

IN HIS MASTER'S FOOTSTEPS

(Life Story of Archbishop Mar Ivanios)

PETER C. ABRAHAM, MYLAPRA



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Anyone who asks for this volume, to read, collate, or copy from it, and who appropriates it to himself or herself, or cuts anything out of it, should realize that s/he will have to give answer before God's awesome tribunal as if s/he had robbed a sanctuary. Let such a person be held anathema and receive no forgiveness until the book is returned. So be it, Amen! And anyone who removes these anathemas, digitally or otherwise, shall himself receive them in double.

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PETER C. ABRAHAM

Mylapra

Translation of "Malankara Sooryan"

by

REBECCA THOMAS

Mylapra



BP No. 93

BETHANY PUBLICATIONS

KOTTAYAM 686010

2001

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First Published

June 2001

Published by

Bethany Publications

Kottayam 686010

Printed at

Bethany Press

Kottayam 686010

Price Rs. 100/-

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

When Peter C. Abraham brought us a copy of his recently published novel in Malayalam, "Malankara Sooryan" and told us he was hoping to get it translated into English I decided I would wait for the translation to read about this extraordinary Archbishop. Months later when Peter had not found a translator I volunteered to do the translation myself.

I am very glad I did so. I enjoyed reading the book and translating it and in the process finally learned about this unusual clergyman. He was a highly gifted man, an evangelist and missionary who wanted to change the lives of his unfortunate fellowman in every way, spiritually and physically, but the strife-torn Jacobite world he was born into, and which had nourished him, would not have given him the peace he needed to carry out his dreams. He would, however, be able to do so in the Catholic fold, and so in my humble opinion, he went over, but he could not, and did not, abandon the unquestionably beautiful form of worship of the Jacobites so he carried it with him, thus giving a new dimension to the Catholic Church.

I take this opportunity to thank my husband, Dr. V.G. Thomas without whose untiring patient help I could not have achieved this work. He chased up words in the dictionaries, and he read and compared Peter's work and mine to make sure I had not erred anywhere in the translation. I cannot thank him enough.

I hope this book will carry the story of Archbishop Mar Ivanios to the four corners of the world, and young people everywhere will be inspired by it. I wish Peter Abraham all success.

Valliath,
Mylapra.
5-5-2001

Rebecca Thomas

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Malankara Syrian Catholic Church is seventy years old, yet one has to acknowledge that no complete and authoritative book has been written so far about its founding father. A book in English does exist written by an Englishwoman, Margaret Gibbons, but it is a little known one. Sadly no one has attempted to tell the story of this extraordinary Prelate even in Malayalam.

It was against this background then that I wrote “Malankara Sooryan” a historical novel based on the life of this remarkable visionary. It was so well received by the reading public, that Bethany Publications which had published the book soon felt that a translation of the same in English would carry the story of his life to a wider public.

I began to look around for someone who would translate this book for me. Someone who would be able to capture the essence of my book and reproduce it in English. I did approach a few people, but eventually found someone in my own backyard as it were. I discovered a retired English teacher, Rebecca Thomas, living in my own village and she agreed to translate the book for me. I am extremely thankful to her.

Archbishop Cyril Baselios, has been kind enough to write an encouraging introduction to my work. In spite of his busy schedule as the one who directs the affairs of the Malankara Syrian Catholic Church and as the President of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of India he has never failed to provide encouragement for my work. I take this opportunity to express my heartfelt thanks to His Grace for

his encouragement for my work.

The Bethany Publications, Kottayam has also given me every encouragement by publishing my works, and in spite of its heavy financial obligations it has undertaken to publish this translation. I owe much to its Director, Father Sylvester Kanjiramukalil, O.I.C. for all the help he has given me. I cannot thank them enough.

I owe special thanks to two other people who helped me financially with this translation. One is Mr. Baby Thomas Naikamparampil of New York and the other is Shri Anthony Vaikkath of Carmel. My sincere thanks to both of them.

I hope and pray that the younger generation of today, and the coming generations will be inspired by the life and times of this extraordinary visionary, His Grace Archbishop Geevarghese Mar Ivanios.

Charivuparampil
Mylapra P.O.
Pathanamthitta 689671

Peter C. Abraham

GREETINGS (Malayalam Edition)

In the recent history of the Christian Community in Kerala there is no one who can in any way be compared to the late Archbishop Mar Ivanios. Not only was he an extremely intelligent human being but he was also extremely good and kind and was also a saintly ascetic who gave up all the pleasures of this world that he might live to fulfil his Master's Will. It was he who single-handedly directed the course of the Syrian Christian community in Kerala towards the Catholic Church, with far-reaching consequences. The process which had started four centuries earlier and which had suffered a crushing break could now be set right. The earnest prayers of the church officials and the faithful for a reunification were finally coming to satisfactory end.

Peter C. Abraham in his delightful historical novel, "Malankara Sooryan" has given a very good picture of the astonishing Prelate who changed the lives of a large number of Christians and non-Christians in Kerala. The younger generation for whom Mar Ivanios is only a name, should in fact be encouraged to read this book to get a comprehensive idea about this astonishing Archbishop. And they should not find it difficult to read it for Peter C. Abraham has adopted a simple appealing style for his narration.

In our Malankara Syrian Catholic community Peter C. Abraham is an up and coming writer in the Malayalam language. My heartfelt congratulations to him for producing such a good piece of work. This should appeal to not only our members but to all who desire reunification. I hope and pray that Peter C. Abraham will produce more such books.

Archbishop's House

Trivandrum

1st August 1996

Most Rev. Cyril Mar Baselios

Metropolitan Archbishop of Trivandrum

Chapter 1

The sudden, unexpected peal of the church bell startled the sleepy little village of Puthiakav and disturbed the concentration of the young boy seated at his study table, memorizing his lessons. The evening bell for prayers had rung a bare half hour or so ago, and he had at once got up to say his evening prayers. In fact he could not have read more than six or seven pages after his prayers when the bell sounded again. And it was an unusually long peal!

“Keevaricha,” his mother called out to him from the kitchen. “Isn’t that our church bell? What could the matter be?”

“Shall I go and find out, Amma?”

He put away the book he was reading in its appointed place on his shelf, and got up. From the clothesline strung across his room, he picked out a shirt, and put it on, and combed his hair. And then it was a quick dash out of his room.

“Take your umbrella, Keevarichen,” his mother called out after him. “It is going to rain heavily.”

He scarcely heard his mother’s words as he ran fast towards the church.

“Don’t worry, Mother. I’ll be back soon,” he called out to her.

As he raced towards the church the young boy anxiously hoped and prayed that nothing untoward had happened. The sky was overcast, and there were frequent flashes of lightning, and frighteningly loud claps of thunder. The boy took shortcuts that he knew of through the wild undergrowth, hoping to beat the approaching rain, but before the initial drizzle had given way to a torrential downpour, he had entered the church porch. The doors were open and he saw in the dim light of a hurricane lantern a number of people gathered together in the church. He then noticed that there was a well-sprung bullock cart standing in the churchyard, the kind that the rich used for travelling. Some dignitary had arrived. He wondered who it could be.

By this time the rain was a veritable downpour, and the night was much darker. The sexton of the church hurried into the church

carrying his own lantern. Keevarichen stopped him and asked him about the visitor.

“Valia Thirumeni has arrived,” answered the sexton.

“What! Pulikkottil Dionysius Thirumeni himself—?”

“Yes,” answered the sexton as he hurried into the church.

A soft glow of excitement spread through him. He could not believe that the Head of his Church was right here in his parish. Such a great dignitary! He, who had guided the Church for three decades, was actually seated in his church. He had only heard about him so far from his father, and now he was actually going to see him.

He entered the church. In the dim light of the two lanterns he recognized a number of important people from his parish. He saw David *Asaan*¹ and his son Yohannan among others. But though he stood on tiptoe and craned his neck he could not see the honoured guest. Everyone was standing as close as they could to hear what Thirumeni was saying. It was indeed a great disappointment to the fifteen-year old lad.

It was not easy to hear what Valia Thirumeni was saying in his soft voice above the roar of the rain, and everyone had to strain their ears to hear him. “We would like to meet Deacon Veettinal as soon as possible. Would one of you go to Vazhuvadi and fetch him, please?”

Everyone fell silent. They glanced at each other and hung their heads. Vazhuvadi was only a mile away, but who would venture out into the storm? The wind shrieked like one gone mad. The lightning sliced through the pitch dark and thunder crashed overhead. No one was willing to go out on such a mission, even if it was to obey the order of the Malankara² Metropolitan.

The crowd must have lost its collective nerve for the boy who could not earlier see anything, was able to squeeze his way through and appear before the Metropolitan. With folded hands he bent forward to receive Valia Thirumeni’s blessing and then humbly said, “May it please, Your Grace, I shall go and fetch him.”

There was a stunned silence. The crowd looked at him to find out who the intrepid boy was. There he stood, fearlessly before the

1. *Asaan*: a teacher.

2. *Malankara* : ancient name for the regions covered by Malabar, Travancore

Metropolitan. His eyes sparkled in the dim light. And the Metropolitan, who in his long life had seen so much that he had not expected to feel surprise anymore, felt a sense of wonder. He caught hold of the young boy's hand and gently pulled him forward.

"Who are you, my son?"

"I am Thoma Panikar's son," he replied.

"Then you must be Father Skariah's nephew. His younger brother's son. Splendid. What is your name?"

"P. T. George. Thirumeni."

"So you have Panikar blood flowing in your veins." Valia Thirumeni's tone was warmly appreciative. "Very good. You may go and fetch Deacon Veettinal."

"Yes, Thirumeni," the boy answered very humbly, and turned to find people making way for him to pass through. The sexton came forward with his lantern and umbrella and gave them to the boy who accepted them and sped off.

The storm had not abated. Keevarichen found himself wading through knee deep water. The swollen skies pelted rain down and the wind shrieked. The lightning flashes were getting rarer but they helped to light his way. The church elders stared after him until the light from the lantern vanished in the distance.

As they stood staring, Thoma Panikar entered the church. He was quite wet even though he carried an open umbrella. He had another in his hand, obviously for his son's use. He looked around for his son, clearly more anxious to see him than meet the Metropolitan. When he heard of his son's mission he unconsciously made the sign of the cross. "Holy Mother of God, look after him," he breathed.

It was not fear that made him cross himself. He did not know what fear was. How could he? He came from a family that in its heyday had been bodyguards of Maharajah Marthanda Varma. When a wild buffalo had charged against the Maharajah who was out hunting, his ancestor had killed the buffalo single-handedly, with his sword. That was the kind of blood that ran in his veins. However, when he thought of his son he knew a strange unease. He could not spell it out even to himself but he was always watchful where his son was concerned.

Thoma Panikar went forward and kissed the Metropolitan's hand.

He had met him several times before.

“You have come in search of your son, I presume,” the Metropolitan said. “I have sent him on an errand.”

“So I learned.”

“You have a very smart son,” the Metropolitan commented. “I trust you are getting your benefits regularly.” For generations the Panikar family had been loyal soldiers of the Maharajah and had been awarded pensions from both the court as well as various churches.

“Yes, Your Grace. I am getting all the benefits according to Your Grace’s orders—the money and the betel leaves,” Panikar acknowledged humbly.

“We hear that you are getting students from far and wide to learn the martial arts.”

“No, Your Grace. I am not teaching the martial arts anymore. The school has been closed and the workers sent away. Nor do I attend the temple functions anymore,” Panikar answered.

“Is that so? That’s good. We are aware that as the personal bodyguards of the Maharajah you are bound to train young people for the job, but it is not a job suitable for a Christian. After all, you are training them for war, but our religion teaches us to love one another.”

“My son Keevarichen is of the same opinion, too. And that is why I have decided to go in for farming. I must teach my son also how to farm,” Panikar replied.

“What is he doing now?” the Metropolitan asked.

“He has passed the fourth form. He was a student of the CMS School here.”

“So far he has stood first in every subject.” It was David *Asaan* who spoke. David *Asaan* had taught him his first letters and was very proud of his pupil’s achievements.

“Condemn such an intelligent boy to farming?” the Metropolitan was aghast. “No Panikar, you must send him for higher education. He has a great future.”

“It is not from lack of desire, Your Grace. The Lord has provided the money also for that. But if he is to go ahead with his studies he will have to go to Kottayam.”

“That is not a serious problem. You must educate him even if he

has to go to Kottayam.”

Everyone in the church was happy to hear Valia Thirumeni's response. They all liked Keevarichen. Thoma Panikar alone did not look happy. The only way one could go to Kottayam from Mavelikara in the year Eighteen hundred and ninety-seven was by boat. Transport was not the only problem. Where would the boy stay and with whom? There were no hotels. All his relatives lived in or around Mavelikara. Kottayam was only thirty miles away, but it seemed like a remote place to him. He could not imagine his little boy leaving home and staying in a strange place all by himself. The normally courageous man found himself wavering.

“There is nothing to think about,” said Valia Thirumeni quite blandly. “I have decided to take him to Kottayam. He can complete his High School and proceed further. He will be of use in the Church. Don't you agree?”

Thoma Panikar did not know what to say. Higher Education was no doubt very good but joining the Church was a different matter. Would it not be better if he followed the profession of his ancestors and joined the army instead? But the boy himself preferred a life in the Church. From childhood he had shown great interest in Church matters and was very particular about his religious observances. He had once suggested to Keevarichen that he join the army and forever afterwards remembered the reply he had received.

“That is not my way, Appa.” Keevarichen had then spent the whole of that day fasting and praying before the candle-lit picture of the Blessed Virgin to make his father change his mind. His mother supported him. The birth of a boy was quite a rare occurrence in her family so she had fasted and prayed for a son, and vowed that if she had a son she would see to it that he joined the Church.

Soon she bore a son and that, too, on the same day as the Feast of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin. She had to fulfil her vow. She had brought him up with that end in view from his infancy onwards. Thoma Panikar could not object, so though he did not approve of it as a career, he allowed his wife to have her way.

“Let it be as Your Grace desires. However, I would like to consult my brother about this,” he said.

“By all means consult Father Skariah. Ask him to come and see me tomorrow morning. He will be only too pleased.”

“I have no doubt about that. It is Keevarichen’s earnest desire to become a celibate priest like his uncle. He has even fasted and prayed for that.”

“Is that so? Father Skariah is one of the few celibate priests in our Church and I am sure your son will be an even greater man than his uncle.”

The Metropolitan was now convinced that his first impression of the boy was correct. There was something special about the boy; as if he were waiting for a call or a signal from his creator.

The storm was beginning to abate. Through the pitch dark there was a faint glimmer of light. The distant glimmer of two lanterns. Everyone stopped talking as they watched the light approaching the church. Keevarichen and Deacon Vecttinal were coming. Keevarichen knew the Deacon quite well as they were not only from the same area but were also related. The Deacon’s wife was a member of the Panikar family.

Everyone felt a sense of relief that the boy had come back safely. They crowded round him praising him and one or two actually patted him on the back for his valour. He, however, did not seem to think he had done something unusual or extraordinary. Nor did he mention the fact that he had hurt himself when he fell among the thorny pineapple bushes by the side of the stream.

“Go to Valia Thirumeni. He is going to reward you for the work you have done,” he heard someone say. It was David *Asaan* who spoke.

Keevarichen was puzzled. He had not done much. All the same he went forward to meet the Metropolitan. Valia Thirumeni lifted the small cross he carried at all times and touched him on the head in blessing.

“I am taking you to the Seminary in Kottayam with me,” said Valia Thirumeni. “Make sure you are ready to set out with me before noon.”

“God! You have answered my prayers,” said Keevarichen to himself. He was almost bursting with happiness. What greater happiness could he ask for! He would be able to fulfil the vow he had made to the Holy Mother of God and become a celibate priest. God’s love and kindness was exceedingly great. All the same he looked a little doubtfully at his father, and was relieved to see that his father

was agreeable.

Father and son kissed the Metropolitan's hand before taking leave. "Be here before noon," the sexton called out rather officiously. The two hurried home to find Keevarichen's mother and younger brother, Mathai waiting anxiously on the doorstep. He ran forward and hugged his mother.

"My prayers have been answered, Amma," he announced, and proceeded to explain everything to his stunned mother. Tears of joy flowed down his mother's face.

"Come in, son, and let us say a word of prayer thanking God for His infinite mercies. And then let's have dinner," she ended on a practical note. They went into the prayer room and lit candles. Noticing that his younger sister, Kunjamma was not present he inquired about her.

"She went to bed when it started raining, and is now fast asleep."

He began his packing soon after prayers and dinner. He first picked out his favourite books *Neethisaram* and *Balaprabhodhanam* and packed them into his trunk and then his other books followed. Over that he placed his clothes and a few other necessary items. It was midnight before he finished his packing and went to bed leaving the night lamp on. In the faint light he could just see the picture of the Holy Mother. He fell asleep without taking his gaze off her.

Chapter 2

Dawn had not yet broken when Keevarichen woke up to the sound of his father's voice as he talked to his mother. "I am going over to call Achen,³ Annamma, as Valia Thirumeni wants to see him. After that I shall go and collect Keevarichen's transfer certificate."

Father Skariah was attached to a church nearby in Mavelikara itself. But unless one left very early there was no hope of meeting him. He would leave on his rounds of the slums immediately after saying Mass, to see what he could do for the old and infirm. That after all was his mission in life. But he would be very offended if he learned from some other source that Pulikkottil Thirumeni had taken his favourite nephew to Kottayam for higher studies.

Thoma Panikar had no desire to offend his brother. So he was up very early and ready to leave before dawn. Keevarichen stood in the doorway sipping the hot coffee his mother had given him, as he watched his father walk away swinging the torch made of coconut palm fronds to light his way.

"I would like to go and meet Parumala Thirumeni and receive his blessings before I go to Kottayam, Amma," Keevarichen said thoughtfully. "Remember the time I was ill with typhoid and was on the verge of death? How I insisted on Thirumeni's prayers in stead of any treatment?"

It was about eight years ago that her son had fallen ill. It so happened that Gregorios Thirumeni of Parumala had come on a visit to a church nearby and the sick child had insisted on being taken to him. He was sure that he would be cured if only Thirumeni would lay his hands on him and pray. No one expected him to live, so to satisfy a deathbed wish he was carried to the church where Thirumeni was visiting. Everyone was amazed at the speed with which the boy regained his health. Was it magic they asked? They did not know that such power to heal is given only to those who have surrendered themselves completely to God.

"Ever since I met Parumala Thirumeni I have had this great

3 *Achen*: father. Christian priests are thus addressed.

wish. I want to become a priest like him,” Keevarichen had said. The devout woman could not have asked for more.

“There is no time now to go and meet Thirumeni, my son. Besides, you have been blessed by him.”

He did not argue. He went along and had his bath and changed into a white *mundu* and shirt and then gave his coloured clothes to his mother to be given either to his brother, Mathai, or some poor people.

So many people to meet, so many to take leave of in the village! He first made his way to David *Asaan*’s house. It was David *Asaan*, who had taught him his alphabet. As he entered the garden the *Asaan* came out of the house to greet him. “Well, well! Look who’s here! My Chattampilla!” said the *Asaan* holding his hands and greeting him happily.

The *Asaan*’s sons, Yohannan and Samuel stood in the doorway and grinned a welcome. Samuel, a boy of his own age, caught his hands and held them fast. They had been classmates from the very beginning, and were of a like mind. From somewhere within the house the *Asaan* brought out and dusted a small stool for Keevarichen to sit. “Come and sit down, my Chattampilla,” he grinned.

It was a title that David *Asaan* conferred on the best student in the class and it was pretty apt where Keevarichen was concerned. The “chattampilla” was the master’s assistant who took over when the master was away. One could always depend on Keevarichen to look after the class well in the master’s absence.

“When are you leaving?” Yohannan asked.

“Before noon,” Keevarichen replied and smiled at him very sweetly.

Yohannan felt guilty and hung his head. He wondered whether he really deserved such a sweet smile. A few years ago he had started teaching in the school when his father retired. He had also taken to drinking and one day, after he had imbibed more than he should, he had entered the class, and for no good

reason had thrashed a student. Yes, the very same P.T. George Panikar, who had come to his house to say farewell. He looked so happy and contented, and clearly bore him no ill will.

“Don’t forget this old teacher when you become a great man,”

said David *Asaan*.

“Never. How can I ever forget the teacher who taught me the alphabet?”

“And even if you do I will never forget such a mischievous boy,” said the old man and proceeded to tell the others a story about Keevarichen as a child.

“It was about eight or nine years ago when he was quite young. I cannot remember why I did so, but one day I lost my temper with him. Whereupon he stood up and extended the bunch of palm leaves on which I had written the alphabet and said,—‘Sir, please take what you have written and give me my leaves.’” The old man’s laugh was so infectious that everyone joined in.

Keevarichen then stood up and offered the packet of tobacco that he had brought as a gift to his old teacher. “Please remember me in your prayers, Sir,” he said.

The old man had tears in his eyes as he laid his hands on the young head and said, “You will become a great man one day, my son.”

The village was agog with the news of his departure for Kottayam. Everyone he met bade him farewell most lovingly. His classmates were very sad to see him go. People came out of their houses as he passed by and bade him farewell. Everyone had a good word for him. He relived his childhood days as he walked past his favourite places and he managed to meet all the people he cared about in the short time at his disposal, before hurrying home. There he found his uncle, Father Skariah and a few other people who had come to see him off. He first went up to his uncle.

“I met Thirumeni before I came here,” said Father Skariah. “He intends to admit you into the Seminary and wanted to know what I thought about it. We must leave for the church at once.”

“I am ready.”

“Your father wanted you to join the army, but I think he is changing his mind now. However, he says he will not pay the Seminary fees,” said Father Skariah.

It was time to leave. Time to say goodbye to the home that had sheltered him for fifteen years. He stood in front of the portraits of his valiant ancestors and asked for their blessings. His eyes swept

over the weapons that they had used in their time, and which now hung on the walls of his home. The sword and shield and the axe and the spear, they were all there. The head of the bison, which one of his forefathers had killed, still hung on the walls of the drawing room. How could he, the scion of such a family, forget his ancestors? Mentally he bade them all farewell.

The family, as is usual at such times, sang a hymn and then said a prayer. Then he picked up the old leather suitcase his mother had provided for his luggage, and set out. He went straight to the church. Everyone who had heard of his departure was there to bid him goodbye. The church was old, nearly a thousand years old, and the Panikar family had traditionally been in charge of the keys of the church. Keevarichen loved the old church. He used to stop to say a word of prayer every time he passed it on his way to school and back.

“Good Heavens! There are enough people here for a procession,” commented the vicar as he lifted Thirumeni’s luggage into the carriage.

Thirumeni raised his hands and blessed the crowd, that had gathered there. He made George sit by him. Once again he silently bade everyone farewell as the carriage moved forward, leaving behind his home, the old church, his village, and everything that was familiar.

Dusk had fallen by the time they reached Kottayam, and Thirumeni was very tired. He had spent the long hours telling the young boy the history of their ancient Church. God must have sent Thirumeni to my village for my sake, George thought as he got out of the carriage.

He looked at the wide corridors of the Old Seminary. Thirumeni had already entered the building, but George stayed outside admiring the beautiful wood carvings that decorated the walls of the Old Seminary. Even in the dim light of the evening sun it was possible to see the skill of the carpenter. And then he saw the Seminary chapel. During the long journey George had kept saying his prayers, but when he saw the chapel he felt he had to go in for a short while at least. He left his slippers outside and walked barefoot into the chapel. It was so silent. What a wonderful place to sit and meditate! Except for the soft footsteps of the Seminarists as they went up and down the

wooden staircase, there was no sound at all. He knelt down in front of the altar and thanked God for all His mercies.

Meanwhile Thirumeni sent for Vattasseril Geevarghese Malpan⁴ who was teaching the Syriac language to a group of Seminarians on the top floor of the building. He beamed a welcome as the Malpan came in and greeted him.

“My mission was successful,” he announced. “What’s more I even got a wonderful present.”

He, the beloved leader of more than two hundred thousand people, was accustomed to getting very good presents where ever he went, and the Malpan did not expect anything more unusual than what he had received in the past. The gold belt he wore on important feast days was one such gift. So was the diamond ring that he often wore. Though he was sure that the gift was something similar, he was anxious to see what it was.

“May I see the present, Thirumeni?” he asked.

A mischievous smile lit up the old face.

“I am going to entrust the gift to you. It is not just gold or silver, but something much, much more. A living gift in fact.” The Malpan was puzzled. Thirumeni relented and said, “He is out there on the verandah.”

In a flash the Malpan was outside, but there was no one and nothing there except an old leather suitcase. He called out to the deacons who were lighting the rooms and asked if they had noticed anyone waiting outside. The deacons went out and came back saying that they had not seen anyone.

Thirumeni went up to the door and called out, “George?” It was then that the Malpan noticed the open door of the chapel and the footwear outside. He went up to the chapel and peeped in. He saw a young boy kneeling there. He was so still he looked like a carved statue. The Malpan stood staring at him for a long while then went back and told Thirumeni that he was in the chapel.

Vattasseril Malpan had a very clear picture of George by the time Thirumeni finished speaking. Hearing the sound of the chapel

4. *Malpan*: teacher in a seminary to train priests

door closing he called out asking George to come in. Very affectionately Thirumeni drew him close and then pushed him gently towards the Malpan saying, "I am entrusting this boy into your care. Please look after his every need."

The Malpan studied him closely from head to toe and liked what he saw. Sparkling eyes, a high forehead, a high-bridged nose, large ears, a skin lighter than his, and a body that was slim and strong. A gentle smile of approval spread over the usually stern face of the Malpan.

"I must go and rest now," said Thirumeni as he went upstairs to his room on the second floor. There was a note of satisfaction in his voice. The Malpan asked the young boy to sit down on a chair opposite him. It seemed to George that the Malpan's hand trembled as if he were ill. Sometimes the trembling was very bad. George wondered if he was rheumatic. He did not look old enough for that, though. Not more than forty, thought George.

He was obviously talking to him, thought George. There was no one else in the room so he leaned back confidently in his chair. The Malpan was squint-eyed, he realized. Squint eyes on a face that had forgotten how to smile made the Malpan look very grim. However, George did not feel uneasy. Thirumeni had entrusted him into the Malpan's care and he knew what he was doing. He would undoubtedly help him to a bright future. After all Thirumeni had made him Malankara Malpan because of his unusual qualities.

"What is your aim? Higher education or the secluded life of a seminary?"

"I should like to have both."

"Thirumeni told me about your scholastic achievements. Do you have any special reasons for opting for the life of a priest?"

George then told him in detail about his meeting Parumala Thirumeni when he had typhoid and how Thirumeni had blessed him and the fever had passed.

Gently and cleverly the Malpan drew him out. They talked about the church and about things in general. Searching questions were asked to test his knowledge of the Bible and George answered them all satisfactorily. More serious and difficult topics were introduced but the boy never faltered in his replies. At last the Malpan, running

his fingers through his scanty beard, commented, "You obviously know the Bible well. How many times have you read it? Once, or twice?"

"I have read the Bible three times."

"Good." There was a pause before he added, "I don't think I'll send you to live among the boarders. You shall have the room next to my own."

Some of the young deacons came down the staircase on their way to the river for a bath. They looked at the new entrant and liked what they saw. The Malpan introduced them to each other.

"This is Geevarghese Panikar. He will be studying with you now." That was the first time that the boy had heard himself addressed that way and he looked at the Malpan. Perhaps the Malpan had not heard his name properly and said so.

"P. T. George Panikar, Achen." That was how his name had been recorded everywhere but the Malpan repeated the same name.

"George and Geevarghese are variations of the same name. In fact Geevarghese is more acceptable as a name in our Church. From now on you will be known as P.T. Geevarghese Panikar," said the Malpan.

The young deacons welcomed him into their group. "You must be very tired after your long journey. Go and have a bath in the river," the Malpan urged and sent one of the deacons upstairs to prepare a room for Geevarghese.

Everything seemed like a dream. How unexpectedly his life had changed! There was a spring in his step as P.T. Geevarghese Panikar walked up the stairs.

Chapter 3

He did not feel homesick at all. Instead he felt he had come home to a joint family. Or was it to a Gurukul? Thirumeni, he felt was the head of a large joint family, with Vattasseril Geevarghese Malpan to look after them all. The Malpan made no allowances for any kind of failure, but then he was a very great scholar himself. There were twenty-five deacons as his classmates and for a diversion there was Deacon Sleetba. The latter had been sent by Patriarch Abdullah of Antioch to train in this Seminary. His broken Malayalam was very amusing to all the young deacons.

Geevarghese soon became familiar with every inch of the place. The Old Seminary seemed to have been lovingly constructed by skilled craftsmen. Every room had beautiful carvings on the walls and ceiling. The river Meenachil flowed past the building on the northern side, and the breeze that blew in from that side kept the Seminary cool. Even more wonderful was the chapel. It soon became apparent to everyone that if Geevarghese was not in his room he was sure to be found in the chapel. Without fail he would be present to assist at the altar on Sundays. At other times he would be cleaning the chapel. He needed no telling to sweep out the chapel after every service. There were always fresh flowers on the altar. Very soon the Malpan gave him the key to the chapel and put him in sole charge.

At the beginning of the new academic year, he started attending the M.D. Seminary High School which was the only English Medium school in Kottayam. He enjoyed the two-mile walk every morning and evening in the company of the deacons. They usually discussed the day's lessons as they walked. He was blessed with the gift of immediate comprehension of what he heard in class and never forgot anything. He had started learning Syriac only recently, but already he was better at it than those who had studied it for a year or so. And because of that the others were eager to accompany him to school and back. He was good in sports, too. Football was his favourite game and he was soon made captain of the team.

He was determined to win the school championship that year.

And win he did. It made him even more popular with everyone in the school. His headmaster was the first to reach him on the sports field and congratulate him. K.C. Mammen Mappillai with his unruly hair and round spectacles was an ardent lover of his community and a good journalist. He knew his students well and was aware that this particular boy was indeed an exemplary student. No subject was too difficult for him. On the contrary he excelled in every subject. And excelled on the sports field, too. Vattasseril Malpan had nothing but praise for him. In fact every master in the school was appreciative of his talents. He was very particular about his daily work in school. Even in debates he could hold his own, and often defeated his Protestant classmates when religion was the topic under discussion.

Vattasseril Malpan was not in that day. He had gone to Parumala to help Gregorios Thirumeni as he often did. Sadly he realized that he would be missing his usual Syriac class so he sat down to read the history of the Church. A copy of Vattasseril Malpan's "Mathopadesa sarangal" lay on his table.

A little later some of the younger deacons came by and invited him to go with them for a dip in the river. Happily he picked up his towel and went with them. Near the bathing ghat there was a large flat rock. As they reached it Geevarghese felt a curious inner urging. He picked up a sliver of granite and drew a cross on the rock.

"What are you doing, Panikar?" The young deacons were mystified.

"From now on no one should go into the water without first kissing this cross," he announced.

The deacons were even more mystified and looked at him as if he were a changeling. It was Geevarghese Panikar all right. But he had never come up with such ideas before. What was the matter with him?

"What nonsense, Panikar! You won't get us to do this," the deacons protested.

"Never mind. Just do what I say for now. You won't regret it, I assure you."

The determination in his voice made them uneasy. Suppose he had suddenly been inspired by God?

"Oh, alright. We'll do as you say," said one of the young deacons and moving forward did as Panikar commanded. The others followed

suit, all except one.

“I am not going to do this idiotic thing. Let’s see what happens.”

“In the Old Testament there are ever so many things that defy logic. Supposing Moses had refused to strike the waters of the sea when the Lord commanded him to do so,” wondered Panikar aloud as the others went into the river. No one had a reply.

As they frolicked at the edge of the water, they heard a sudden cry for help. Someone had slipped into deep waters and could not come out of the swift currents.

Slowly the current began dragging him downstream against all his efforts. While the others stood paralyzed, Geevarghese jumped into the water and pulled him out. It was the deacon who had refused to kiss the cross on the rock and he was a very sorry deacon, indeed.

“I realize now that you were not being stupid, Panikar,” he said. Everyone looked at him in wonder, but he just stood there very quietly without saying a word.

Those who had finished their baths began to leave. Fearfully, they looked at the rock and then went back silently to the Seminary.

It was quite late when Vattasseril Malpan returned. Geevarghese went up to his room with the day’s mail, and then waited while the Malpan read his letters. If immediate replies were necessary Geevarghese would take dictation and then mail them the next day. The Malpan took out a letter and gave it to him to read.

It was a letter from his father in response to one sent by Valia Thirumeni to his father and Father Skariah. On the memorable visit to Puthiakavu, Thirumeni had obtained verbal consent from Geevarghese’s parents and uncle for his ordination as deacon, preliminary to becoming a priest. But that was not enough. It was necessary to have the consent in writing, and Thirumeni had written for it. The reply was, “We have no objection to Geevarghese’s ordination as a deacon.”

Every minute before the ordination was spent in prayer. Everyone was happy about it. He was to be ordained in the church at Puthenkav on the day of the Blessed Virgin’s feast and invitations were sent out accordingly. His parents came well ahead of time to the church and hugged him and blessed him.

And so P.T.Geevarghese Panikar took the vows and was ordained Deacon P. T. Geevarghese Panikar by the highest authority of the

Malankara Church, His Grace Pulikkottil Mar Dionysius, in the presence of a large number of priests.

His appearance changed along with his ordination. Until now he had worn a white *mundu*, and white shirt with long sleeves. From that day onwards he wore a long white robe that reached down to his ankles, a thick black cord round his waist and black cap on his head.

By this time he had also finished his school career and it was decided that he would join the C.M.S College and study English Literature. It was his intention to make use of his time to read as extensively as was possible.

The C.M.S.College was the first college in Malankara. Getting admission there was difficult and it was a matter of pride that he did get in. He was not going to waste his time there. The library became his favourite place and he started borrowing all the old books. He borrowed books that no one had touched for years. He would pull them out, blow off the dust, and take them to his room and read them. Some of his teachers asked him how he hoped to answer the question papers by reading those old tomes, which were in no way connected to his electives. He only smiled in response, but when the results were declared he had topped the class.

Now that he was a college student he spent most of his nights reading. He once managed to get a book he had long waited for. He was quite unaware of the passing of time that night as he devoured the book. He was reading the history of the Church. He read late into the night enjoying each page, visualizing for himself those early times. Noticing the light streaming out of his room onto the verandah, Vattasserill Malpan called out to him. He was the Principal of the M.D. Seminary School and he wanted to discuss certain reforms that he planned. However there was no response, so he called out again with no luck. He then got out of his bed and went over to Deacon Panikar's room and pushed the door open. What he saw stunned him.

The hurricane lamp that lit the room hung from a beam of the ceiling. The deacon was standing on a low stool near the lamp to get the full benefit of the light, oblivious of his surroundings. As soon as he saw the cover, the Malpan recognized the book. It was a book written by Parumala Thirumeni on the laws of the Church and a copy of it had been given to the Malpan as he was a favourite student of

the author. A history of the Church lay open on the table. The Deacon had hit upon this novel way to prevent himself from falling asleep over the book. The Malpan did not have the heart to break the young man's concentration, so he shut the door very gently and went back to his own room.

"What single-minded devotion to his work!" he said to himself.

Chapter 4

Two years later Deacon Panikar had passed the Intermediate examination. If he wanted to study further he would have to go further afield. Somewhere outside his home state. Valia Thirumeni and the Malpan were convinced that Madras Christian College was the best place for him. Had not most of the church leaders graduated from that Institution and were there not still a few who were pursuing their higher education there? A. Philip was one such student and the Malpan asked him to meet the young deacon in Madras. Philip was waiting on the platform in Madras when the deacon's train arrived. He soon saw the tall strapping young deacon striding along carrying his suitcase in his hand.

"Hello! I am A. Philip. I come from Kalloopara. Of the Maret family."

"Glad to meet you. Mr. E. M. Philip told me about you. He is Thirumeni's secretary, you know."

"I was asked to meet you and make all arrangements for your stay in Madras. I have found a place for you to stay and have also secured admission for you in college."

"I hope to read History for my degree. I hope I have a seat for that."

"Oh, yes. No problem there. However, you will be staying in Sullivan Garden Hostel, about four miles away from the college. All the priests are staying there and I thought you would be happier with them."

"Where is the Y.M.C.A. here?"

"That is close to the college."

"Then I shall seek accommodation there. I will be able to study without wasting time going to and fro. That would be much better, wouldn't it?"

"In that case I shall go along and make inquiries there today." The Deacon liked the college at first sight. A beautiful building in spacious grounds. The prestigious institution had been set up by Scottish Missionaries on four hundred acres of land in

a quiet area called Tambaram. As it was run by Protestants, it was only natural that Protestant faith would predominate and quite natural that they would try to spread it. Deacon Panikar decided to do something about it.

One evening he spoke about this to two of his friends, A. Philip and K.V.Chacko who were out walking with him. Chacko, his classmate, hailed from Mallapally. A tall, well-built man and a very good speaker. The Deacon said, "Many students from our community come here to study. Something has to be done to save them from succumbing to the lure of the Protestant faith. We must create an association of our students. Let us make a list of all the Syrian Christian students here"

"Where shall we meet?" asked Chacko. "My room in the Y.M.C.A. is a very spacious one. We could meet there once a month. We can hold discussions, debates, and even cultural programmes. I am sure everyone will enjoy it."

"In that case let's form an association ——an association for Syrian Christians. We shall call them all together," said A. Philip.

"Suppose we meet every second Saturday of the month?"

"Good idea! That will reduce our work. We won't have to keep informing them about each meeting," said K.V. Chacko.

Both A. Philip and K.V. Chacko worked enthusiastically, carrying out the deacon's instructions and a Malayali Samaj was born. Under their care it flourished and grew strong. Every second Saturday the deacon's room was crowded with Malayali students who came to hear his stirring speeches. He had read much, and now he shared his vast learning with those who came to the meetings. He chose to speak in his mother tongue, Malayalam, though he could speak equally well in English, and this perhaps kept his listeners enthralled, unaware of the hours that slipped by. He began with the history of the Church, but soon went on to other topics from the Bible and from life in general. He explained the Bible in great detail. Topics which were generally regarded as too difficult for the layman to understand, were explained in clear, precise terms. These sessions were followed by discussions. Everyone joined in enthusiastically, each one passionately defending his stand.

It was a great achievement. The Malayali Samaj and its organizer became well known in the College. Even more important was the

fact that the talks and the discussions generated by the deacon helped the Malayali students to do well in college. Dr. Miller, the Principal, and the other Professors were well aware of his contribution to these students and acknowledged it.

The deacon's aim was to create a society of students who would be conscious of their religious heritage, and he started working towards that end. It did not however, affect his own work or career. He obtained his B.A. degree and then thought about his next activity. He did not have to think long. A missive from Vattasseril Malpan settled it.

“Start reading for the M.A. degree.”

He had longed for that but had not expected it. None of the clergy of the Malankara Church had ever taken a Master's degree. He would be the first to do so. He was also aware that Valia Thirumeni was responsible for this decision and he was deeply grateful for the same.

His co-workers in the Malayali Samaj were overjoyed. They looked at him with awe and realized that he would someday become a great man and rejoiced in the thought. The deacon was not one to let grass grow under his feet. He looked at the future of his project and said, “When we, the organizers of our Samaj leave after graduation, the Samaj must not be allowed to die. We must induct new members who will take up the work enthusiastically.”

“You will be here to attend to all that,” said K.V. Chacko hopefully.

“I will have to work very hard if I am to become a Master of my chosen subject,” said the deacon.

“Don't expect me to work with you. You will have to take up the leadership and help the Samaj grow.”

He was a man of his word and his friends were aware of it. He would not be likely to change his mind. “Well, then you must come and give us a talk whenever you have some time to spare,” said his friend, A. Philip.

“I cannot guarantee that. I plan to move out of the Y.M.C.A. and take up a room elsewhere. I have a treatise to write in English.”

He would have to read a lot to collect material for his treatise and the college library did not have the necessary books. However, he had discovered a large library in the city, and he decided to rent a

room somewhere near it so as to save time.

“What is the subject of your treatise?” asked his friends.

“Were the Syrian Christians Nestorians?”

“That is a rather tiresome subject, isn’t it, Deacon?”

When the Portuguese came to India and found practising Christians they had tried to dismiss their relevance by claiming that the Indian Christians were Nestorians. The church in India denied it, of course.

And the argument had gone on, making it a rather worn-out topic.

“I am going to thrash it out thoroughly,” said the Deacon smiling very confidently.

“But what is this Nestorian belief?” asked a student who had never heard of this before.

“Nestorius was the Patriarch in Constantinople in the fourth century. He was of the opinion that the Blessed Virgin was Jesus Christ’s mother—not the mother of God and that was what he taught. When the Synod met at Ephesus, the new teaching was discussed, as a result of which Nestorius was excommunicated as an enemy of the Church. Nestorius fled to Persia which was at war with

Constantinople; so he knew he would be safe there. There he taught his faith and helped spread his version of Christianity far and wide.”

“But how can anyone say that this belief had spread into our church?” asked K. V. Chacko.

“It didn’t. Remember the time there was no bishop here to consecrate a new Metropolitan? At that time, you will recall, twelve priests had together undertaken the consecration of the Metropolitan. He then wrote to several Patriarchs to send a bishop to have his consecration ratified but only the Patriarch of Antioch had responded and had sent the Bishop of Jerusalem, Mar Gregorios. Before that Patriarch Ahathulla who had been a close confidante of the Babylonian Patriarch, a Nestorian, had set out for India, but he never arrived here.”

“I did not know about this little detail,” admitted Philip.

Deacon Panikar smiled and carried on speaking. “After the Synod at Udayamperoor, the Portuguese spread the canard that we

were Nestorians and so burned down our ancient library, destroying all our old documents. Our knowledge of our own history is therefore rather limited.”

The discussion ended with everyone wishing the deacon all success with his writing. He found rooms to stay near the Library and moved into it. A. Philip went along with him to help. The deacon worked hard day and night. Philip was of great help copying out notes or rewriting the material. His old head master, K.C. Mammen Mappillai sent him some rare old records to help him with his research and his good wishes for the success of the project.

The book was finally published. Everyone who read the book praised it. Good reviews of it appeared in many of the Church Publications. Even renowned Church historians waited anxiously for their copy. Everyone had only one thing to say. “Hard facts set forth in a scholarly and yet simple fashion.”

An ardent follower of the Church, C.P. Tharakan approached the deacon and asked for permission to translate the work. It was granted and soon the book titled “Were the Syrian Christians Nestorians?” was sold out in a matter of days.

The deacon’s career was closely watched by the Church which had many high expectations of him. The long awaited day arrived when his results were announced. He had obtained his Master’s degree with very high marks.

It was time for the deacon to go back. He owed much to his benefactors. He had to go back and repay the generosity. He had to return from where he came.

Chapter 5

What greater honour could anyone desire! In its entire history the church could not have boasted of another clergyman with a Master's degree. Even as a deacon he had achieved renown. He was well known as an extremely intelligent scholar, and a fantastic speaker. He had authored a book of remarkable depth, and that too, in English. Among the young people he was much appreciated as a natural leader.

Everyone rejoiced in the rise of the young deacon who was lovingly referred to as M.A. Shemmashen⁵.

He was accorded a warm welcome on his return. Parishes vied with one another to give him the best reception possible. People turned up in large numbers at these receptions because they were eager to hear his speeches.

There was nothing particularly striking about his appearance except for his fiery eyes. A slim young man with a darkish complexion and longish face on which his beard was just beginning to grow.

But when he went up on a dais and started speaking, no one remembered his ordinary looks. He was a veritable fountain of knowledge. His ideas were always deep, but expressed in language that was simple enough for everyone to understand. As he was well versed in Sanskrit, his language was very beautiful too.

He had the extraordinary ability to fire the imagination of his audience. When he held out his Bible to the audience and declared that God had sent this message to His children to save them, the audience waited eagerly for his explanations.

Invitations to speak poured in. Almost everyday he had an appointment somewhere. His favourite topic, and perhaps the most popular, was the Sacraments. The Sacraments were the breath of the

Church and attempts to erode their importance was a very worrying factor. He had to save the Church from the assaults of Protestant thinking. To do so he had to make the people aware of the sanctity of the Sacraments. He needed help for his self-appointed mission

5. *Shemmashen* : deacon

and he found it in two priests who were like-minded. In spite of the fact that he had the ability to speak impromptu, authoritatively and conclusively, he preferred to prepare and rehearse his speeches to suit his audience. Very soon the people began to refer to him as the “Koodasha⁶ Shemmashen.”

However, there were two worried people. Two people who had rejoiced in his growth yet were now worried. They were Pulikkottil Thirumeni and Vattasseril Malpan. What kind of a job were they going to offer this amazingly talented young man! After much thought and discussion the Malpan opined, “Why not give my job to him?”

“Are you suggesting that you give your job as Principal of M.D. Seminary to him?” Valia Thirumeni inquired.

“Exactly. I have occupied that chair for the last eleven years and now I should like to gift it to Panikar Shemmashen. Ever since our beloved Parumala Thirumeni passed away I have been looking after the affairs of Parumala Seminary. So for the last five years I have been holding two posts and wishing I could surrender one into capable hands. I much prefer life at Parumala, but I could not think of anyone suitable here.”

“Your idea is good, but have you thought of K.C. Mammen Mappillai who is the headmaster here? Besides the deacon was his student. How would any headmaster like his student to lord it over him?

He is extremely conscious of his status, too,” said Thirumeni thoughtfully.

“He is a bit too conscious of his status,” replied the Malpan wrathfully. “He hates having to submit to his superiors. I hear he is going to Trivandrum for some treatment. Let us appoint the deacon in his leave vacancy temporarily.”

Thirumeni gave his assent and the Malpan informed the deacon of his appointment. The deacon was prepared, if rather reluctantly, to obey the orders of his superiors.

He was going back to his old school after ten long years. But this time the reins would be in his hands. He felt very happy, except for one worry. Would it not make his old Headmaster unhappy?

6. *Koodasha*: Sacrament

He decided to consult his mentor, the Malpan.

“Don’t worry about that,” soothed the Malpan. “Mammen Mappillai is going on leave for a month.

The summer vacation starts immediately after that. By the time school opens again in June everything will have settled down. You go ahead and take charge now. You may also occupy the Bungalow.”

How could he disobey his mentor who loved him so much? He stretched out his hand and accepted the keys.

“May the Lord bless you.” Valia Thirumeni was old and weak and found it difficult to straighten himself from the deck chair he was reclining in. With shaking hands he blessed the deacon with his cross, and prayed for his success.

The deacon first went to the chapel and said a short prayer. Then he made his way to the M.D. Seminary. Mammen Mappillai was in his office, discussing school matters with his manager, E.M. Philip, who handled all the accounts of the school. Mammen Mappillai took no notice of the deacon, but carried on with his work. With his round glasses perched at the tip of his nose he was writing something. The deacon ignored the snub and gently began to speak.

“I have been asked to take over temporarily,” he began.

He was not allowed to say more. Mammen Mappillai burst out speaking. “I know. There is no need for you to say more. I have seen this coming.”

“Are you not pleased about it, considering that I am your student?”

“I am a very honest and blunt person, Shemmashen. I do not believe in prevarication. You are without doubt the best man for this job. But to come here as Principal, as my superior, is very hard for me to bear. Vattasseril Malpan wants me to relinquish my post here as Headmaster, and this is just his trick to achieve his desire.”

“Don’t say that. If he wanted to oust you he would not have put you in charge of the Lottery to make money for the school expansion,” said the deacon hoping to pacify the headmaster.

“We have a school in Tiruvalla, don’t we? It may not be as prestigious as this school, but surely you could have been appointed as Principal of that school? I asked the Malpan this very question, but he said that it was not suitable. I then asked him to appoint me at

least as Secretary of the Church, but that was not feasible, either. No one is interested in my problems. I know that Thirumeni sympathizes with me, but he does not dare to cross the Malpan. I get one hundred and twenty rupees as salary and was somehow able to make both ends meet. I shall have to think of something else now.” Mammen Mappillai was very bitter. “Surely God will show me the way.”

The deacon quietly listened to the outpouring while he prayed in his mind, “Lord please help him.”

Though he accepted the full charge of the school, he spent all his holidays preaching the Word of God in various places. And thus he reached Parumala, his favourite place. For one thing it was the place where the saintly Gregorios had been laid to rest. Secondly, there were many scheduled castes living there. Society might want to chase away these dark-skinned people like rabid dogs, but he wanted to draw them to him and hug them. Was it something in his genes, or was it the early example set by Father Skariah? Was he not in the habit of visiting the slums as soon as he had said Holy Qurbana? How often had he, the deacon, accompanied him on his rounds as a young boy!

He too, began to visit the homes of the lower castes, alone. No one was willing to go with him. And they, the dregs of society, stared at this vision in a white cassock and black cap who stood smiling at them. When he found out that a few of them were Christians he asked them why they had changed their faith.

“We belonged to the low castes, Master. We never had any kind of freedom. We were not allowed to wear clean, white clothes, nor walk freely on the roads, nor worship in a temple. We were sick of it,” said a woman in disgust. She pulled forward the little boy that clung to her and pointed to the scars on his back. “This is my son, Master. He earned this when he went to the temple hoping for a little food as he was hungry. He was almost killed by those people in the temple.”

His heart melted as he listened to the story. He hugged the little boy who was weeping at the memory of that terrible punishment, and comforted him.

“Who helped you to become Christians?”

“One Geevarghese of Chennithala. He is an evangelist.”

“Can you tell me where I can find him?”

“He will be somewhere in this area. He is a good teacher and he sings well.”

The deacon soon came across the evangelist on his rounds. He found him teaching a group of new converts to the faith. The deacon stopped and listened to him and was much impressed by his ability to reach out to the people. He needed a man like Geevarghese in his work. As it is, he had invitations to ever so many places to speak. It was not always possible to go everywhere. If he had a man like Geevarghese to help him he would have the beginnings of a small team of evangelists. But first he had to approach him with the idea.

“I’d like you to work with me. Would you like that? I could get Metropolitan’s permission.”

The evangelist could not believe his ears. Here was the well-known deacon asking him to work with him when he had spent hours wondering how to expand his own work. But he was a little doubtful about the outcome.

“I belonged to the lower castes, too. It was Parumala Thirumeni who brought me to the faith and baptized me. But I do not think I have been accepted even by the priests. We are not allowed to enter the church as the others do. How then can I work with you?”

“Have faith and trust in God,” encouraged the deacon. “Society has to change and we have to work towards that end. You can help me in this.”

Chapter 6

“You are no longer going to be known as plain Chackochen. Henceforth you will be known as Manager Chackochen,” said the deacon as he sat working in the Principal’s Bungalow.

His responsibilities had increased. He needed someone to work with him, someone who he could trust. The first person he thought of was a relative of his from Mavelikara. Chackochen of Kilileth house had a rice mill in Tiruvalla, but when the deacon invited him to work with him he did not have to think twice. Chackochen was his father’s brother’s grandson, but that was not the only reason. They were very good friends and though Chackochen was younger than the deacon by five or six years, neither felt the difference. His sober, mature ways made him ideal for the job.

As he put back the books away, Chackochen jokingly said, “If you tell me what my duties are as Manager, I might be able to say whether I accept the job or not.”

“First of all I want you to make sure I do not sleep for more than four hours a day.”

“That means you work for twenty hours a day. And you are asking me to prevent you from getting adequate rest! Not a pleasant job! I do not think I want to work here, Shemmashen.”

“This job is no laughing matter, Chackochen. It is an extremely responsible job. I am going to give the M.D. Seminary a thorough overhauling. But before I do that, I have to bring about certain changes within me if I am to do the job well. Twenty hours a day will not be enough. Remember, I also have to manage the Old Seminary, in addition to my work in the Church. It doesn’t matter how late I go to bed. I want you to wake me up after four hours.”

“Alright.” Chackochen had understood the gravity of the situation.

The deacon was searching for something on his table, obviously something important.

Chackochen asked him what it was.

“A book. I read it constantly. ‘The Imitation of Christ’ ——a book in English. Will you look for it on the shelf, please?”

He insisted on reading it every morning as soon as he woke. Even his morning prayers were said only after he had read a portion of the book, which was a gift that the Madras Christian College gave to each of its star students. After the Bible, there has been no book that has sold more of its copies, than this exceptional creation of a Roman Catholic priest named Thomas 'a Kempis. It is a book that makes its reader give up all worldly ambitions and makes him move closer to God. He never tired of it no matter how often he read it. On the contrary it only made him eager to read it again.

"Is this what you are looking for?" asked Chackochen holding up a slim book bound in red, with gold lettering on it.

"Yes, that's it. It should always be found on my table."

The deacon was very anxious to do his best for the M. D. Seminary High School. He was very anxious to find the necessary funds for its improvement as the grant given by the government was not enough to cover all its expenses. He wanted to improve the quality of the education imparted by the school. And not just that. He also wanted the students to understand that character-building went hand in hand with the education offered. He had many other dreams, too.

He had a lot of travelling to do with work connected with the Church and the School and though many had advised him to get his own vehicle he had ignored it. Now he decided to buy one. He found a smart-looking four-wheeled horse-drawn carriage at an affordable price and bought it. Soon he and his vehicle were a familiar sight in Kottayam town. When the people heard the delightful tinkle of the brass bells on the horse's collar they eagerly made way for the carriage to pass through, and would then stand and gaze lovingly at the figure in sparkling white clothes, driving his horse with such an imperious air. The deacon was a very popular person indeed!

The naughtier elements among the schoolboys were very happy that their Principal had acquired a horse and carriage. The sound of the tinkling bells gave them enough time to stop their mischief and pull on a sanctimonious face. Not that they escaped from the deacon's sharp eyes that seemed to see right into their souls. The guilty soon found themselves acknowledging their mischief.

As soon as the carriage stopped in front of the school, the school

peon dressed in his uniform would go out to the carriage and pick up the deacon's bag, a black one with his name spelled out in white on it, and walk ahead of the deacon looking very important. The deacon walked behind him without looking to the left or right as he made his way to the office. Everyone loved to watch his arrival. All except one man. K.C. Mammen Mappillai.

Soon after his arrival he would go on a round of the school, swinging his cane. The deacon knew each and every boy in the school and his antecedents. He also taught in some classes. He never stood up to teach but always sat on a chair. So it was the duty of the peon to see that his chair was carried from classroom to classroom, according to his timetable.

He was extremely patient with those boys who had learning problems. He would pick them out and then spend extra time with them bringing them up to par with the other boys. However, he had no patience with the lazy ones. Or with the stubborn. He used his cane on the palms of their hands in punishment, then watched for changes in behaviour. There was one very stubborn boy who was a headache to all his teachers. He made no effort to learn but tried his best to lead his mates astray in school. He was older than his classmates and simply refused to take advantage of what the school offered. All his teachers gave up in despair, but not the deacon. He decided to teach the boy a lesson. He struck the boy on his palm until it bled. The sight of the blood inflamed the boy more and he loudly threatened to file a criminal case against the deacon. The next day the boy's father came to the deacon and apologized. "I am extremely sorry to hear about my son's behaviour, Shemmashen. I assure you it will not happen again."

"Where is your son?" asked the deacon.

The boy, who was standing outside, entered the room very slowly.

The deacon caught him by the hand and drew him inside. He tenderly stroked the hand he had beaten and asked,

"Does it still hurt you?"

"No."

"No? But the pain you inflicted on my heart has not abated yet. Until you become the boy I know you can be, my heart will throb with pain."

The fury died out of the boy's eyes. With real remorse in his voice he said, "I give you my word that I will never hurt you again."

The deacon took a deep interest in his hardworking, studious students and that is why he took such a loving interest in Yakub of the Kalapurackal family of Olassa. He was the eldest son of the family.

His father had passed away long ago. His maternal uncle, N.I. Pothan was a teacher in the school. But the deacon had another reason, a very important reason. From childhood Yakub had had a great longing to become a priest. But his mother was against the idea and refused to give permission. Finally he told the deacon about his ambition, his desire. At once the deacon cycled to Yakub's village, Olassa and talked to the boy's mother and left only when she consented to her son becoming a priest. From that day onwards Yakub became the deacon's most devoted student.

His fame grew as a Principal. Wherever he went there were receptions to honour him and at the reception held by the church in Niranom he received a gold watch as a gift.

The next day the news was splashed in the Malayala Manorama, a paper published by the Kandathil family. K.C. Mamen Mappillai who belonged to the same family did not approve of it. He had resigned his post as Headmaster of the school and had gone away. E. M. Philip who had looked after the correspondence of the Malpan for years and the financial affairs of the school, had resigned from his post as secretary, for no specific reason. When he was asked about his resignation he is supposed to have remarked, "Why have three people do the work when one man is enough to carry out the job of Principal, Manager and Secretary? I thought it better to leave while the going was good."

A secretary, however, was necessary. Who better than K.V.Chacko who had been his dear friend in Madras? They had always got on well together. And so K.V. Chacko was appointed as his secretary.

The deacon went to the Old Seminary immediately after his reception in Niranom as he had heard that Valia Thirumeni was ailing. Valia Thirumeni was lying on his side when he went into his bedroom. There was a large ulcer on his back, which was not responding to any treatment. In spite of his pain Thirumeni spoke very gently to the deacon.

“My days are numbered. I am aware that we do not anoint a successor during one’s lifetime, yet I have written to Antioch for permission to anoint Vattasseril Malpan as the new Metropolitan. I received permission to do so today.”

There were two candidates for the post of the new Metropolitan. One was Ramban⁷ Coorilos and the other was Vattasseril Ramban. Of these Vattasseril Ramban was undeniably the more suitable for this high post. Yet there were people who objected to him on the grounds that he was physically not very attractive. Surely that was no reason to deny him the post!

The deacon was very happy to hear this. He at once hurried over to meet Vattasseril Ramban as he was now known. He found him leaning back in his easy chair immersed in thought. He was wearing his *masanapsa*⁸, the cap worn by the clergy above the rank of a priest and a loose black cassock, the symbols of his elevation. He had not changed a bit otherwise. He was just fifty years old, but his beard was almost fully gray.

“My congratulations!” said the deacon. “I heard the news from Valia Thirumeni.”

“It is all the will of God. I must admit, however, that I have hoped and prayed that it would be my hands that anoint you as a priest.”

“When are you going to Jerusalem?”

“According to the decree sent by Patriarch Abdullah I am to proceed immediately. I plan to leave next week. Ramban Coorilos will go with me. I would like you to make all the necessary arrangements.” “Leave all that to me. I shall do all that is required,” said the deacon. “However, I must ask you something. As far as I know our Church has always enjoyed self-governance, so I fail to understand why you have to go all the way to Jerusalem at such expense to be consecrated.”

The question startled Vattasseril Ramban who commented, “Your ideas are way beyond ours, Shemmashen! Better not think on

7 *Ramban*: a monk. A priest is ordained a Ramban before he is consecrated as bishop

8 *Masanapsa* : a conical shaped close-fitting cap covering the head and coming down to the nape. Rambans and Bishops wear it at all times.

those lines, for it won't serve much purpose. At least that is my experience."

"What experience do you mean?"

"Well, you must know that Antioch does not interfere in our temporal matters. But that is not the case with our spiritual affairs. Once before we had requested Patriarch Abdul Massiha to allow us freedom in spiritual matters, but that request was turned down."

"That dependence came about only in the time of Mar Athanasius who preceded the present Valia Thirumeni. Before that, didn't every Malankara Metropolitan consecrate his successor here? I wonder if our Church will ever be able to enjoy that freedom once again," mused the deacon.

"Why waste time thinking of the impossible? I am now thinking of something entirely different. I wonder what gift I should take with me for Patriarch Abdullah when I meet him in Antioch."

"Yes, you have to take a gift. I have heard that the Patriarch is very fond of such things."

"Very true. He has come to Malankara before, along with the reigning Head of the Church. He was Mar Gregorios then. Something happened, something pretty shameful. You probably have heard the story," said Vattasseril Ramban.

"Well, I have always talked to our elders about things that happened long ago, but which have not been recorded for posterity. So I have heard a few stories."

"You are aware that only the Patriarch has the right to make the oil used for anointing at consecrations. When Patriarch Peter III came to India with the oil to distribute to all our churches, he entrusted the job to Mar Gregorios. What do you think happened? He sold it to the churches and made money out of it. The Patriarch at once condemned the action and said, 'He is insolent and avaricious and very lazy where spiritual matters are concerned.'"

"To have to acknowledge such a man as our spiritual Head is painfully sad. To be consecrated as Bishop by such a man is unthinkable, as far as I am concerned," said the Deacon.

"Don't worry. Just remember that he has the legal right to do so."

"Actually Patriarch Abdullah is not the real Head of the Church. Patriarch Abdul Massiha is the real Head. When there is more than

one Patriarch the one who is most senior rules. The others retain their title, that's all. Patriarch Abdul Massiha was anointed first, so he is the real Patriarch and it would be much better to receive one's consecration from him," said the Deacon.

It was true there were two Patriarchs, each one claiming to be the Head. Everyone knew that Patriarch Abdul Massiha had been sidelined with no powers whatsoever although he was the senior. He had been anointed long before Patriarch Abdullah was. The latter had however bribed the Caliph with five hundred gold sovereigns and had managed to get himself declared as the senior Patriarch forcing Patriarch Abdul Massiha to retire.

Vattasseril Ramban was disturbed by the arguments but acknowledged the truth of the matter.

"That's all very well," he said "but remember Patriarch Abdul Massiha lives in Mardin. It is far from Jerusalem and means travelling for many days through hostile countries. Robbery is rife in those countries. Besides it would not be wise to be ordained by a Patriarch who is barely tolerated by the Sultan of Turkey. Moreover, supposing someday someone else is ordained by Patriarch Abdullah and comes here, do you think he will acknowledge me in any way? Patriarch Abdullah has set people against each other in the past and may well do it again. Many here are pro-Patriarch Abdullah, as you know. They can all turn against me."

"In that case let us instead, consider what gift you can give the Patriarch. Valia Thirumeni has in the past received many crosiers as gifts. They are all stored away in his strong room. There is one in silver, a truly magnificent one. Suppose you take him that as a gift?"

"As you please," said the Ramban. "There is another matter I must mention to you. Patriarch Abdullah has informed us that he and a few of his people intend to visit us. He will let us know his itinerary as soon as it is finalized."

For some reason the news was not as exciting as it should have been. It was only the fourth time that the Supreme Head of the Church would be visiting the Church in India in its entire history. It should have been exhilarating, but the deacon felt uneasy. His mind was filled with strange doubts.

He forgot his whereabouts as he stood there thinking of the future.

Chapter 7

Vattasseril Ramban had returned from Jerusalem as His Grace Geevarghese Mar Dionysius, Head of the seven dioceses of Malankara. He was undeniably an impressive figure, thought the deacon as he went forward to greet him. He now wore a red robe and the high-crowned Episcopal hat of the Bishops of the East on his head, and had a walking stick in his hand. His eyes still had the same stern look and his hands still trembled.

Two other newly-ordained bishops had come back with him. One was Mar Coorilos. He did not recognize the other at first glance but a closer look revealed that it was none other than his old classmate Deacon Sleetba, now Mar Osthathios. He might not be very impressive but one had to respect his position, thought the deacon as he went forward to greet him.

Mar Osthathios was delighted to see his old classmate. He could speak only one language fluently and that was his mother-tongue, Syriac. He had, however, during his stay in Malankara picked up a smattering of Malayalam and it was in that language that he spoke to the deacon.

“Ah! Panikar Shemmashen. You M.A. now. Good! Good!” he beamed.

All Kottayam was excited over the reception planned for the new Malankara Metropolitan. All the arrangements for it were left in the capable hands of Deacon Panikar. It was he who led the new Metropolitan to the reception hall where Mar Osthathios, who was presiding over the function had already taken his seat. Not many were happy to have him preside. As Patriarch Abdullah’s relative he had hoped to be appointed head of the Church, and he had made no secret of his disappointment. This, then, was regarded as a sop, so everyone kept quiet. Konat Mathan Malpan rose to offer felicitations and Mar Osthathios leaned forward to listen closely. There had been only two Malpans in the church, both equally qualified and knowledgeable and close rivals. Now one of them was the Head of the Church, and the other was standing there to felicitate him..

The audience waited with bated breath for Konat Malpan’s

speech. Mar Osthathios was sure the Malpan would give vent to his own ire at the elevation of his arch rival and looked pleased at the thought. However Konat Malpan's speech was an exemplary one. He was full of praise for his contemporary's achievement. And Deacon Panikar who knew exactly what the Malpan really felt, stood numbly as he listened to this highly laudatory speech.

Mar Joachim of the Kandanad diocese was also present at the meeting. He had a special duty to perform. He was to offer a gift, not to the new Metropolitan, but to Deacon Panikar, the pride of the Church, thanking him for all that he had done for the Church. When the deacon was called to the stage the audience clapped their hands in appreciation. The deacon walked up the dais and stood in front of the old and venerable Mar Joachim who pinned a gold medal on his cassock with a few words of praise. And then came the announcement that they had all been waiting for. The deacon was to be ordained as priest.

The Metropolitan called him and asked him when he would like to be ordained.

"Any festival day connected with the Blessed Virgin," was the reply.

Everyone knew of his utter devotion to the Mother of Jesus. The Metropolitan also was aware of it, so he consulted the calendar and suggested the Feast of the Assumption. "Parumala would be the ideal place for it," said the Metropolitan.

The deacon went to meet Valia Thirumeni one day. Thirumeni had handed over the charge of the Church to the new Metropolitan and was resting. He was reclining in a chair half asleep when the deacon went in, but woke when he heard the deacon's soft voice addressing him. His dim old eyes brightened when they recognized the gem that he had discovered eleven years ago.

"I hear you are going to be ordained," Thirumeni said. His tone was approving.

"By the Grace of God and of course your prayers, Thirumeni," said the deacon. "Your Grace must come and bless me on that day," he added impulsively.

Thirumeni reached out and gently stroked the deacon's face and said, "The Lord has not called me to my eternal rest, just so I can attend your ordination. The distance is a bit much but I will definitely

come. I want to place my hands on your head in blessing.”

Finally it was the feast of the Assumption. The deacon had spent several days by the tomb of Parumala Thirumeni fasting and praying. A large crowd had gathered to witness the ordination. In spite of his age and general weakness Valia Thirumeni had travelled the distance from Kottayam to Parumala as he had promised. The actual ceremony was conducted by Vattasseril Thirumeni, Mar Dionysius. After the long service according to the Antiochian rites the deacon was now a priest. M.A. Shemmashen had become M.A. Achen

This was followed by a rush of receptions in his honour. But even as he went from one reception to the other, he was concerned about his future. He had been made a priest. The people expected much from him. What was his mission going to be?

He could of course continue as Principal of the M.D. High School and work towards making it a college. Yes, that would be his mission. However there was another mission closer to his heart. Spreading the Gospel. He had roped in Geevarghese *Upadeshi*,⁹ who was now doing it all by himself. This was what he wanted to do, but there were other considerations, and he could not devote all his time to Gospel work. He had succeeded in arousing the people from their lethargic frame of mind to take an active interest in studying the Bible and understand all the rites of the Church. If not attended to, that spark would be extinguished. In stead of travelling about and speaking to different audiences would it not be better if he stayed in one place for a length of time and taught the people there, before moving on to another place?

A new difficulty arose. Constant preaching left him with a sore throat. He had practically no voice to speak of. He then thought of seeking help. Someone who would be able to repeat aloud what he said at meetings. And that was when he thought of his old companion Samuel, son of his erstwhile teacher David *Asaan*. He received no written reply to his invitation, but one day Samuel turned up, ready to help his old friend in his mission.

M.A. Achen, as he was now known, said, “I like Parumala very much and I intend to work in the slum areas of this place. The people

are very poor and in every sense shunned by others. Let us work there and do some thing to change their lives for them.”

The fact that he had been asked to take charge of the Parumala Church and parish was an added bonus. It would make his task that much easier, so he and Geevarghese *Upadeshi* and Samuel moved to Parumala.

He called on all those whom he had earlier preached to. He was disappointed to see that their lives had not changed in any way. They opened out their hearts to M.A. Achen and their woes were many. Those who had joined the Christian fold were worse off than the others. Their daughters, past the marriageable age were still unmarried. Neither the Christians nor the Hindus were willing to marry them.

After much thought Achen called a few young *pulaya*¹⁰ youths together and spoke to them. He was able to persuade them to marry these girls according to the Christian rites, but when his parishioners heard of it, they objected vociferously. They were up in arms against Achen’s social work and threatened the poor *pulaya* folk. Not that it made any difference to Achen and his plans. He was determined to conduct the wedding at the prestigious Parumala Church and even decided on the day. He secretly called on the young boys and girls and told them his plans.

“The parishioners will not allow your wedding to be conducted in this church. So I want you to come here about two hours before Mass begins. The wedding must be over before the people come to church.”

He gave each girl a small gift the day before the wedding. A *minnu*¹¹ strung on an ordinary bit of thread, and a new outfit to those girls who were too poor to buy one for themselves.

He went to church very early that day. The *pulaya* couples had already assembled there before daybreak. By the time the parishioners smelt a rat and went to the church the wedding was over. They stormed into the churchyard shouting at the priest and beat up the poor people. One of them shouted an insult. “ Why don’t you buy one of these girls a wedding outfit and marry her yourself?”

10 *pulaya*: a scheduled caste

11 *minnu*: little gold pendant worn by married Christian women

The priest's fury knew no bounds. He sprang up the Seminary steps like a charging lion and faced the crowd. The crowd fell silent as he stared down each rebellious soul and roared at them.

"Go on. Go ahead and laugh. But if you don't suffer for this like live fish on a string, then the God I believe in, is no real God."

Chapter 8

Valia Thirumeni was dying. As soon as he heard of it, M.A. Achen informed Vattasseril Thirumeni who was then teaching Syriac to the Seminarians at Parumala. The two of them had immediately rushed over to Kottayam where Valia Thirumeni was staying. All the leaders of the Church were there. Thirumeni himself was not aware of anything or anyone, not even the pain of the sore on his shoulder, which had refused to heal.

Vattasseril Thirumeni and Panikar Achen sat beside the half-unconscious Valia Thirumeni. Kilileth Chackochen sat nearby waiting for M.A. Achen's instructions. Mar Osthathios was restless and walked about the room. Konat Mathan Malpan and C.J. Kurien, a rather short, handsome man sat close to each other whispering to one another. They were the joint trustees of the Church and assistants of the Metropolitan. Naturally they would have much to say to each other. Mar Osthathios stopped his perambulations occasionally, to whisper to them. A little further away K.C. Mammen Mappillai sat with E.M. Philip. After a while M.A. Achen told Kilileth Chackochen to inform the school that Valia Thirumeni was sinking. K.V.Chacko came over immediately and a little later Mathew Paret Shemmashen came over leading the students.

Everybody's eyes were focussed on the dying Thirumeni. Deacon Paret, a favourite student of M.A. Achen came and stood next to him while Kilileth Chackochen made arrangements for the people to go in and see Thirumeni. He, who had watched over and guided the destiny of the Church for forty-four long years, now lay waiting for death to come and claim him. Like a flame that flares before extinguishing itself, so the tired old face suddenly brightened. His half-open eyes registered several faces moving past, but his lips only trembled without forming any words. M.A. Achen gently wet the dry, chapped lips and leaned forward to hear the last words. Whatever he wanted to say remained within him unsaid. And so he passed away.

Next morning all the newspapers reported on their front pages that Pulikkottil Mar Dionysius, of the Malankara Church had gone to

his eternal rest.

It was M.A. Achen who organized all the arrangements for the funeral, and he found willing helpers in the fold to carry out his plans. The funeral was a very grand affair. It was followed by special prayers and Masses for the soul of the departed and on the thirtieth day an *adiantharam*¹² was held. On the same day Vattasseril Thirumeni was given full charge of the Church and a public meeting was organized to felicitate him.

In spite of his heavy load of work, M.A. Achen was aware that Mar Osthathios and the two joint trustees of the Church, Konat Malpan and C.J. Kurien were plotting something. If M.A. Achen approached them they would at once stop their conversation and look blandly at him. He knew that Konat Malpan was furious about the elevation of Vattasseril Malpan, especially now that the latter had become the Head of the Church. Konat Malpan had been very complimentary at the reception given to Vattasserril Thirumeni on his return from Jerusalem as a bishop, but his heart was full of anger and spite. He had succeeded in getting C.J Kurien on his side. Kurien was a very influential man and was the joint trustee of the Church, reporting directly to the Head.

M.A. Achen watched them closely but discreetly as he sat waiting to meet the Metropolitan. He had come with plans to make M.D. Seminary High School a full-fledged college. K.C.Mammen Mappillai also had come with some important scheme to present to Thirumeni.

Thirumeni entered the reception hall accompanied by M.A.Chacko a member of the governing body, and sat down in the Presidential chair. As the meeting progressed it was clear to M.A. Achen, that neither Mar Osthathios, nor Konat Malpan, nor C.J. Kurien were interested in the proceedings. They seemed to be waiting for some crucial moment even as Thirumeni took up matters for discussion. It was when he took up the matter of the joint trusteeship that the trio came to life. Up to now the Old Seminary had been looked after by Pulikkottil Thirumeni himself, and Vattasseril

¹² *adiantharam*: ceremony to mark the end of the mourning period, generally on the fortieth day.

Thirumeni had accordingly taken charge of the keys as Valia Thirumeni lay dying. When this was mentioned the joint trustees sprang up.

No one thought of telling them firmly to sit down. How could anyone do so? Both were very influential people from very prominent families and it was not seemly to order them to sit down. Konat Malpan's voice rang through the hall. "If one person is going to keep the keys and have sole charge of the affairs of the Seminary why bother to elect joint trustees?"

Before any one could respond, C. J. Kurien's voice rose, "It is time to stop this farce of having three trustees otherwise all three should have equal control over the Seminary and its estates."

The audience was perturbed. That such a comment should have come from two people who had made not the slightest objection to it in the days of Pulikkottil Thirumeni, and had in fact, worked within that frame!

Vattasseril Thirumeni had not brought in any change. He was only carrying on a tradition that all of them had known. Neither of the joint trustees had thought of challenging Pulikkottil Thirumeni, but had in fact carried out all his orders uncomplainingly. What had happened to them now?

Vattasseril Thirumeni cleverly managed to postpone discussion of this topic in public by going on to another matter. He announced the new heads of the different dioceses. Angamali and Kandanad would go to Joachim Mar Ivanios, Kottayam and Kollam would go to Geevarghese Mar Coorilos, and India-Ceylon Mission to Julios Mar Alvarez. Mar Coorilos had been very disappointed when he did not get the full charge of the Church, in stead of Vattasseril Thirumeni, but he did not raise the issue now. He intended, however, to rake it up someday.

Mar Osthathios was equally disappointed. He had not been given charge over a diocese and now he sprang up and in his broken Malayalam demanded an important post. Else why, according to him, had he been sent by the Patriarch all the way from his distant home to this foreign land? The audience was not impressed. They had not forgotten their old Sleetba Shemmashen, and his antics and they decided that a foreigner should not be put in charge of a diocese. They also decided that Vattasseril Thirumeni would have full control

over the old Seminary. The joint trustees had to help him where necessary, that was all.

Mar Osthathios, Konat Malpan and C.J. Kurien left the meeting together before it closed. The meeting ended and the public dispersed.

M.A. Achen called a few of the Managing committee members of the Church and went straight away to see Vattasseril Thirumeni. K.C. Mammen Mappillai, Elenjikkal John Vakil, E.M. Philip, M.A. Chacko, and A. Philipose were the committee members, and they all gathered around Thirumeni. M.A. Achen pulled out a letter from his bag, took out his round reading glasses and fixed it firmly on his nose. He opened out the letter and said to no one in particular. "This is a letter from Patriarch Abdullah in London to our Thirumeni here. The Patriarch is setting out for India at once."

M.A. Achen then sat down. It was for Thirumeni now to decide what had to be done. Thirumeni was quick to announce his decision. "We must go and receive the Patriarch when he lands in Bombay. I am aware that he has come here before, but this is the first time he is coming as the Supreme Head of the Church, and we must accord him due respect."

K.V. Chacko, the Secretary, who was writing down all the decisions lifted his head to ask, "If I could be told who Your Grace's companions would be——."

"The reception here must be well-organized. We shall hold a reception in Bombay, followed by one here and it is up to you committee members to make all the necessary arrangements. I have to go to Bombay and I plan to take M.A. Achen with me. You can decide everything else."

The committee decided that K.C. Mammen Mappillai and E.M. Philip would go with Thirumeni and M.A. Achen. The rest of the committee would stay back and make all the arrangements for the receptions. Just then Konat Malpan walked in, and when he heard of the latest developments he insisted on going to Bombay. Thirumeni discussed the request with M.A. Achen before giving his assent.

It would be many days before the Patriarch reached Malankara from Bombay. He would have to visit many centres en route and so arrangements would have to be made in advance. Mammen Mappillai would be immensely useful for such work. He would have his right hand man E.M. Philip to help him. As for M.A. Achen he had to stay

close to Thirumeni to answer his every call.

“Where do we get our funds for the journey?” asked E.M. Philip.

“From the trust fund,” replied Thirumeni instantly.

The imminent visit by the Patriarch was soon common knowledge and preparations were underway to receive him as he visited the various churches.

Even while he was working in the school M.A. Achen was constantly planning for the trip and making the necessary arrangements. By the time he finished his work connected with the school, it would be evening and then he could be found sitting on the rock behind the school with his close associate K.V. Chacko and A. Philipose. The student boarders would be out on the playgrounds playing football and those among the teachers who lived in the school would be setting out on their evening walk. Though they would all stop to greet M.A. Achen no one dared to invite him to go along with them for a stroll. He was not one to waste time. He had much on his mind and these days his mind was filled with the preparations for receiving the Patriarch. There was much to discuss with his two friends and much to finalize.

“The Patriarch must have a definite reason for this visit. He would not undertake such a long journey otherwise, would he?” M.A. Achen mused one day.

“According to the Metropolitan’s circular to the churches, the purpose of the Patriarch’s visit is to strengthen the hands of the governing body here and renew the ties with Antioch.”

M.A. Achen merely grunted in reply. Obviously he was not much impressed. A. Philipose seemed a trifle uneasy.

“I am not happy with the comments thrown out by Mar Osthathios. From some of his remarks I get the feeling that all is not above board as one would imagine. Something about his having been sent here with equal rights as Valia Thirumeni. I once heard him say that things are going to change once the Patriarch gets here. That everyone will be made to toe the line.”

M.A. Achen now had more grist to his mill.

“Forget Mar Osthathios. He is the kind to trumpet all his private wishes as facts. I am afraid however, that this visit will split our church into two factions,” mused Panikar Achen.

“Split the church?” K.V. Chacko was astounded. “How can he

do that? I am aware that the Metropolitan has enemies, but split the church——!”

M.A. Achen had the history of the Church pat in his mind and he directed the thoughts of his companions to certain incidents in the past.

“Can you tell me when the Jacobite Church came into being? Do you know who was responsible for it? Two years after the oath taken at the Koonan Kuriss¹³ separating us from the Roman Catholics, a Patriarch named Mar Gregorios arrived. He was really at the root of it all. Then came another Patriarch, Mar Gregorios and the Thozhiur Church was born. Mar Pathrose was the third Patriarch who came about thirty four years ago, and then the Church was split with a whole group walking out and creating the Mar Thoma Church. Now here comes a fourth Patriarch! I hope we will not have another split—”

His friends were alarmed, but M.A Achen managed to allay their fears. Just then they noticed a deacon come running up the rock to where M.A Achen was seated.

“There’s a telegram from Mavelikara for you, Achen. Father Skariah is very ill.”

Unbelievable. No doubt Father Skariah was about seventy years of age, but he had never been known to be ill, and had always carried on with his work tirelessly.

M.A Achen sprang to his feet and hurried away to his bungalow. Thariathu Panikar had sent the telegram and had added that his relative was ill with the smallpox. He quickly changed into a fresh cassock and packed another into his bag. He also took with him a bottle of sacred oil to anoint the sick and dying. Several people objected to this sudden journey. Those were the days when smallpox patients were sometimes buried alive to contain the fell disease. It spread so fast and killed so easily. M.A Achen did not hesitate, however. As the Metropolitan had taken his horse and carriage, Achen brought out his new Humber cycle. He would have to do the horse’s work that was all, but it would take him to Mavelikara.

There were potholes and stones of all sizes on the road, but that did not deter him. He rode along as fast as he could. People stared at his uncommon vehicle. Some people recognized him and called out

a greeting, which he either did not hear or ignored, so great was his anxiety to reach home before his uncle breathed his last.

It was very hot and the sweat poured down his back. Achen was getting tired but he did not stop for a rest. He had only one thought. He must reach his uncle. After all, he was not just his father's brother. He was also his spiritual guide. He had spent his life for the downtrodden and now he was dying. He had to reach him.

It was nine o'clock at night when he reached Mavelikara and he rode straight to Thariathu Panikar's house. He was extremely thirsty and tired. He drank deeply and long of the cool water that was brought to him. In between he stopped to inquire about his uncle's health.

"Where is he?" he asked. Thariathu Panikar led him to the back of the house where there was a room separated from the house, standing by itself.

"Be careful. You know what he is suffering from. It is contagious. I sent for you only because he has been asking for you. Don't stay too long but come away quickly."

The old priest was suffering from smallpox and there was no known cure for it. If a person contracted it, his relatives would isolate him in an outhouse and push in water and food. Even his closest relatives would hesitate to see him. There were numerous tales of smallpox patients being wrapped in mats and buried alive, so great was the fear of the disease.

M.A Achen ignored the advice, and merely asked if any priest had come to give him his last sacrament.

"No, no one has," was the reply. "Father Skariah did ask for a priest as he wanted to make his confession. That was not done, either. One or two priests did come and look at him through the window, but made no effort to go inside."

M.A Achen opened the door and walked in. There was a hurricane lamp inside but there was not much oil in it and the light was dim. The old priest lay curled up on the bed with his eyes closed. There were so many smallpox pustules on his face and his body that it was difficult to recognize him. A fetid smell filled the room. M.A Achen leaned over the bed and called the patient softly. His happiness at hearing the loved voice could be seen in the half-opened eyes.

"You ——came——" he muttered.

There was no time to be lost. Death always creeps in like an unexpected thief.

“Don’t you want to make your confession?”

The old priest seemed to come alive then. The younger priest leaned over to hear the faint words as he made his confession. Eagerly he opened his heart to his nephew and the latter listened patiently. Then he gave him absolution followed by Holy Communion and then said the prayers for the ill and dying.

“Now I can die in peace,” said the tired old priest. M.A Achen then knelt before him and the old man blessed his spiritual successor. Then he leaned his head on the young shoulders and breathed his last. He had gone to his eternal rest.

Chapter 9

He had never seen, let alone met, a Patriarch before and he stared at the imperious figure in a red robe descending from the big white ship, *Egypt*, that floated on the dark waters in the harbour at Bombay. They were all there, except Mammen Mappillai, waiting to receive him in the traditional way with garlands of flowers. E.M Philip stood in front holding a garland, ready to drape it round the patriarchal neck, next to the Metropolitan himself. Mammen Mappillai was outside in the city making all the arrangements for Patriarch Abdullah's stay in Bombay. Konat Malpan, wearing an English hat, stood aloof from the rest of the party. A number of people from the community living in Bombay had also gathered at the quay to receive their Patriarch.

The Patriarch slowly walked forward to the waiting crowd. He looked so different from those waiting to see him. His red complexion, his Arabic headgear, his milky-white beard that foamed down to his waist, all set him apart thought M.A Achen. There were two Rambans on either side of him from his own country accompanying him, and together they moved forward. He was holding the silver crosier that Vattasseril Thirumeni had presented him, when he had gone to Jerusalem for his consecration. Vattasseril Thirumeni garlanded the Patriarch and welcomed him. The other dignitaries of the church who had accompanied Thirumeni to Bombay kissed the hands of the Patriarch in greeting. M.A Achen was the last to greet him. As he bent over the Patriarch's hand the latter asked Thirumeni in Syriac whether this one was the priest he had talked about.

It seemed to Achen that there was something very insolent in the tone, something not quite in keeping with the positions of the two dignitaries in question and felt a vague sense of unease. But he did not show it in any way. What could they have talked about him in Jerusalem, he wondered.

"Yes, this is the man who has dedicated himself to the Church," replied Thirumeni.

Something good has been reported about him, thought Achen. Perhaps the Patriarch has made up his mind about his future. He

hoped it would all be for the best.

Konat Malpan had his own hopes and he kept close to the Patriarch, ready to do whatever the Patriarch wanted. However, the Patriarch after blessing the crowd that had gathered, went away to his room to rest. The Rambans who accompanied him were in the next room.

M.A Achen knocked at the Patriarch's room and entered carrying a sheaf of telegrams in his hand. They were all messages from various people welcoming him to this country, and Achen dutifully read them all out to the Patriarch. They were all in English and Achen read them and translated them into flawless Syriac for the Patriarch, which pleased him very much.

"The reports we had of you do not do you justice," said the Patriarch. "We would like you to be our secretary until such time as we leave."

It was for this post that Konat Malpan had been angling. And the Patriarch has given this high post to me, thought M.A Achen, in pleased satisfaction. He would be the right hand man of the Supreme Head of the Church. It was no mean honour.

Along with the congratulatory telegrams there was a sealed letter in the Patriarch's name. He handed it over to the Patriarch without opening it as it looked like a private letter. The Patriarch himself therefore opened it, but frowned as he realized it was in English, a language he did not know.

"Doesn't this man know better than to write to me in a language I do not know?" the Patriarch fumed. "I am going to order Mar Dionysius to close down all the English schools and teach the children through the medium of Syriac."

He then handed the letter back to M.A Achen. "Read it and let me know what it says. I can understand only Syriac."

Achen opened the letter and read it. It was from one Ittoop of Kottayam, who had, without informing the Metropolitan, written directly to the Patriarch. It was most unusual. But the priest did not betray his surprise as he calmly announced that the writer wished to present ten thousand rupees to the Patriarch.

It was a stunning offer and the Patriarch's eyes sparkled when he heard it. He couldn't believe it.

"Is that a fact?" he asked in an awed voice. "God is surely with

me....Does this man have any special reason for giving me such a large amount?"

"Oh, yes, he has a very specific reason for this munificence. He is convinced that all the property held by the Church here is the property of the Patriarch, and that the Patriarch should go to court to settle the issue if need be," explained Achen. "He says that this money is to be used for the expenses that will be incurred on this account."

The Patriarch at once took back the letter from M.A Achen and put it away safely in his pocket. He showed no embarrassment. Instead he looked as haughty as ever as he looked searchingly at the priest to find out what his attitude was. The latter's face was expressionless, but his mind was in a turmoil. The uneasiness he had earlier felt seemed to be gathering force now. Was this the reason behind this unexpected visit from the Supreme Head of the Church? Was it his intention to lay claim to the property of the Church? Until now the Patriarch had only been the spiritual Head and had never laid claim to any worldly property. Was it his intention to break this tradition? The priest wondered what the outcome of this would be. One thing was clear in his mind. He would be on the side of truth.

Patriarch Abdullah watched him closely, then tried a little diplomacy.

"There's no need to mention this letter to anyone else. Let it remain with us. We have taken certain decisions before coming here. We may have to differ with Mar Dionysius. In that case would you be on his side or ours? " It was a difficult question to answer and M.A Achen answered it after some thought.

"His Grace Mar Dionysius is my teacher and guide. I will stand by him as long as he does not deviate from the path of righteousness. I cannot say more."

The Patriarch's face fell. He had been hoping for a very different reply and was disappointed. However, he at once started devising how best he could get Achen on his side.

"You will no doubt remember that we are the Supreme Head of the Jacobite Church worldwide. If you stand by us we shall see to it that you achieve a great position in the Church," was the only remark he made.

"I am always ready to do whatever I can to promote the interests

of the Church in my own humble way. But I do not expect any rewards for my work.”

The Patriarch did not reveal in any way whether he was pleased or displeased by the priest's remark. In stead he went on to ask many questions about the church and M.A Achen very cleverly fielded each reply without showing his hand.

Very soon it seemed to both of them that the hours-old acquaintance was of longer standing. The Patriarch began to discuss even personal matters and then broached on his relationship with the Catholic Church.

M.A Achen knew all about that. He knew about his superior's ambitions to become the head of the Church and how he had joined the Catholic Church for a while when all his tactics had failed. He had remained in the Catholic fold for ten years as Bishop of Homs Diocese and had left only when he saw a chance to become Patriarch of the Church in Antioch.

However, he hid these truths from M.A Achen when he blandly remarked, “We went over to the Catholic Church to learn all about their faith.”

M.A Achen controlled his wayward tongue that longed to ask if it was not enough to read any one of the books available on the subject to find out what the belief of the Catholic Church was. Before he could say anything the Metropolitan opened the door and called him to discuss the plans for the Patriarch's journey. Everything had been arranged and the Patriarch was in fact eager to move on to Malankara.

The party travelled via Ooty to Malankara and drove straight to Kottayam, and halted outside the gates of the Old Seminary. A royal reception had been arranged. People from every parish had come in their hundreds and thousands for the reception. C.J.Kurien and Konat Malpan were hovering around eager to make a good impression on the Patriarch. Soon M.A Achen drove up in his decorated horse drawn carriage to take the Patriarch to the Seminary. The Patriarch entered the carriage and M.A Achen followed him holding the crosier. This annoyed Konat Malpan exceedingly. After all he was a Malpan and should have been allowed to bear the crosier and be alongside the Patriarch. Here was his junior now elevated to a high position. He could not bear the insult and unconsciously clenched his fist as he watched the entourage drive off with the Patriarch blessing the wildly

cheering crowds. And so they reached the Old Seminary.

The Patriarch first went to the church and prayed there. Then he was formally invited into the Seminary, which was fully decorated. Everywhere there were people waiting to kiss the Patriarch's hands. Spacious rooms on the northern side of the second floor, next to the Metropolitan's rooms had been prepared for the important guests. The Patriarch relaxed on the bed for a while before he asked M.A Achen about the Parumala Church.

"We understand that Parumala is celebrating the feast of its patron saint. In that case we should go there at once. We can rest afterwards."

So M.A Achen set out with the Patriarch to Parumala.

There were crowds everywhere. People had come from far and wide to attend the celebrations. M.A Achen first moved to the tomb of the saintly Bishop, knelt down and closed his eyes and prayed very earnestly. It seemed to him that there were dark clouds gathering over the Church. He prayed that God would guide them all in this dark hour. When he reached the church, the Patriarch was seated with the Metropolitan beside him watching about twenty people count the offerings.

The sight of the pile of coins made the Patriarch's eyes glisten and gladden his heart. When the counting was over, M.A Achen was told that three thousand rupees had been collected by way of offerings. The accounts were meticulously written out and handed over to him. Achen immediately moved to the Metropolitan to hand over the money and accounts, but stopped in his tracks when he heard the Patriarch's voice ring out.

"Give that money here. It belongs to us."

The remark so startled the Metropolitan that he got up. He was aware of the avaricious nature of the Patriarch but he was determined that while he was in charge he would not allow the money to be taken away. It was his responsibility to safeguard the property of the Malankara Church, after all. He looked straight at the Patriarch as he said softly and firmly, "The expenses of the Church and Seminary here in Parumala are met solely by the offerings of the people. Please do not ask for this money, Your Grace."

The Patriarch was not prepared to listen. "I'm afraid the expenses of this seminary are not our only concern. From now on we shall

look after the expenses of the whole Church in Malankara. Therefore all the offerings given here must be handed over to us.”

The Metropolitan found it difficult to answer but he was determined not to yield to the Patriarch’s demands. He looked at M.A Achen who understood the appeal. Very firmly Achen said, “I doubt if any decision can be taken without consulting the Malankara Association.”

“You impertinent fellow,” the Patriarch roared at Achen. “We shall see to it that you are punished for this. We hope you have not forgotten Ivanios of Jerusalem. You will suffer the same fate.”

Hearing the loud and furious voice of the Patriarch, Advocate E.J. John who had come to take part in the celebrations hurried in. He caught Achen’s eye and asked, “What happened to Ivanios of Jerusalem?”

Achen slowly moved to the door and told the advocate what he knew about Mar Ivanios who had been the representative of the present Patriarch in Jerusalem when Abdul Massiha had been the rightful Patriarch. Mar Ivanios had worked at Abdullah’s instigation to oust him and put Abdullah in his place. When he had got what he wanted Patriarch Abdullah had shown no compunction in casting off his faithful servant on flimsy grounds. Poor Ivanios had been excommunicated.

When he heard this the Advocate looked grim and worried. This was unacceptable to him. As a member of the managing committee he couldn’t possibly do anything that would reduce the status of their beloved Thirumeni. Yet what could he say or do? How should he handle the matter?

“Is the Patriarch serious?” he asked Achen. “Or is this something that came up suddenly?”

“Well, it is quite obvious to me that the Patriarch has come here with some ulterior motives. He seems to have had his eye on the wealth of the church here.”

“”Wouldn’t it be disastrous if we gave in?”

“Of course it will be. We cannot afford to yield. If we do, our heritage which we have looked after so carefully for centuries, will be lost.”

“And the Church here will become subservient to Antioch,” mused Advocate John.

“Hmm. Very soon this Church will become a dead institution.”

“How are we going to tackle this tricky situation?”

“There’s only one way. We should all get together and oppose the claims of this Patriarch.”

“He will have people to support him.”

“Well, even when one’s mother is being beaten there will be two sides. It is quite possible that some people who even now are hovering around the Patriarch are hoping to come into power——people like Konat Malpan and C.J.Kurien.”

“They are our Joint Trustees, aren’t they? If they side with the Patriarch our side will be weakened and they will emerge strong.”

“It is the Malankara Association that elected the trustees. It is enough if the majority in the Association stands by Thirumeni as one. We have to explain the matter and its consequences to them and make them stand by us.”

It was getting late and time to leave for Kottayam. The Patriarch walked out of the church looking quite displeased, as if he had made a mistake coming here. He looked at Konat Malpan and said, “Let’s leave for Kottayam now.”

Both M.A Achen and the Metropolitan behaved as if nothing had happened. Even at the end of the journey it was clear that the Patriarch had not forgiven anyone. He could best be compared to a cobra that had suffered an injury. He wanted to strike back——strike the Metropolitan in such a way that he would writhe and fall. After that he would have to tackle M.A Achen who was the next most powerful person. He was not sure, however, what side Achen would take. If he stood by Mar Dionysius he would have to be disposed of, too. With these two out of the way things would be easy. He would then have full control over the Church in Malankara.

As a first step he sent out letters to all the churches calling for a general body meeting without informing the Metropolitan of his intentions. Soon representatives, one or two laymen and a priest from each church began arriving in Kottayam to attend the meeting. The Patriarch himself presided over the meeting and began to speak and soon made his intentions clear.

“I am the head of the Church of Antioch and as such I am Supreme head of the Church in Malankara also. We expect you to give this to us in writing.”

The congregation was shaken. There was a sound like the buzz of angry bees as each one discussed the outrageous suggestion with his neighbour.

The Malankara Association always had two rival parties vying for positions——those from the north and those from the south, with Konat Malpan leading the north. But this time there were no sides. It was clear that the majority were against the proposition.

M.A Achen was in the front of the congregation between Advocate John and M.A.Chacko who was the Police Chief in Cochin. He stood up and spoke against the Patriarch. He was soon followed by Advocate John, Mamen Mappillai, K.V.Chacko, E.M. Philip, A.Philipose who all opposed the idea. They all showed that they were solidly behind M.A Achen.

The Patriarch shook with anger and could not speak, so he changed the subject.

“We do not need you to grant us the power. We only require the power that God has granted us. We came here to discuss another matter, actually. We believe you are in need of more bishops. Tell us how many you need.”

The thousand odd people who had come as representatives of about three hundred churches shouted out their reply.

“Two——we need only two.”

That did not please the Patriarch, either.

“There are seven dioceses and only three bishops. Surely you need a bishop per diocese? We have decided to consecrate four more bishops.”

But many were opposed to the idea. Advocate John got up and said, “Too many bishops are a burden on the Church. The Roman Catholics number about three lakhs and yet have only three bishops. Why then should this Church which has only two lakhs as members have seven bishops? When Patriarch Pathrose visited us here, he created seven dioceses, and from that time we have had just three bishops to manage this Church efficiently.”

It was clear that the majority was against consecrating more bishops. His intention to create more bishops who were sympathetic to his ideas was clearly a non-starter. The Patriarch sprang up angrily, stamped his foot and swept out of the hall and went up to his chambers on the second floor.

The Metropolitan, M.A Achen and Advocate John went after him. The Metropolitan spoke appeasingly to the Patriarch. “ It is evening and the people want to go home. Please send them away in peace by blessing them.”

He got a rude answer for his pains. “Don’t speak to me. You did not give me the money collected at Parumala. We are going to excommunicate you.”

It was the Advocate who replied. “May I ask why, Your Grace?”

The Patriarch was silent, but the lawyer did not let go. He repeated his question.

“Reason?” roared the Patriarch. “This fellow beats the seminarians mercilessly.”

M.A. Achen found it difficult to stay in the same room and hear his beloved teacher abused. He found himself making up his mind about certain things and slowly walked out of the room.

Chapter 10

“Who has the authority to consecrate Bishops?” asked one of the students while M.A. Achen was teaching the seminarians about the sacraments in the M.D. Seminary. He found himself fumbling for words, momentarily. The answer was not difficult, but if he spoke bluntly it would annoy those students who were on the side of the Patriarch. Even in the classroom there were now two sides. Nevertheless the truth could not be denied, whatever the consequences might be.

The students waited eagerly for the answer. Without any hesitation he said, “That authority rests with the Synod of bishops. A bishop can be consecrated by even two or three bishops if necessary, according to the decision taken by the Synod at Nice. Our Bishop Alvares was so ordained by three bishops in Malankara.”

The reaction to this was mixed. Some of the students suddenly looked more cheerful, while others were downcast.

The class proceeded even after school hours were over. No one was anxious to leave. They had missed many classes because of the Patriarch’s visit and had much to catch up with. Achen sat there explaining things, and clearing doubts. There were many intelligent seminarians who were more friends than students to M.A. Achen. First of all there was Deacon Yakub and after him came Deacon Mathews of Paret. Recently a few more had joined. One was a grand-nephew of Mar Dionysius of Vattasseril, one Deacon Joseph of the Valakuzhy family in Mallapally who lived in the Old Seminary. He was a notable sportsman. There were two other deacons from well known families with strong ties to the Church. One was Deacon Joseph of the Pulikkottil family and the other, Deacon Philipose was from Cheppad. Both were good speakers and writers. They were a good class and M.A. Achen answered their every doubt before bringing the class to an end.

Knowing that there were several people waiting to see him he went along to the Old Seminary to meet them and then they all went in to see the Metropolitan, who was sitting in his room sunk in thought. When he saw M.A. Achen he said, “The Patriarch has been sending

his Rambans to me. He insists on a written admission of his authority over the Church here. It seems a few churches like Puthupally have already submitted their letters accepting his authority over them.”

“No matter who submits such letters, Your Grace should not sign any such document. No Patriarch has any authority over the worldly affairs of the Church. Only the Synod of each area has that right. Our Metropolitan here has every right to govern the Malankara Church as he thinks fit. The Greek Orthodox Church has about a hundred and fifty million people as members, and they all owe allegiance to the Patriarch of Constantinople. But he has no control over their worldly affairs. And this is true of the Bulgarian and Rumanian Churches, also.”

M.A. Achen was an expert in the history of the Church and they all calmed down as they listened to him.

“Notice of a general body meeting has been sent to every church. I should like you to explain matters to the people, Achen,” said Thirumeni.

Achen was not very happy at the idea. “At the general body meeting called by the Patriarch it was clear that the majority of the people were on our side. Is it then necessary to call for another formal meeting?” he asked.

“You are right, no doubt. I am aware that it is difficult for our people to come from the far flung places when there are not even proper roads. All the same a general body meeting is absolutely essential. It is necessary to inform our people of the correct situation. I understand that the Patriarch’s men are going round to the various churches trying to draw as many people to their side as is possible.”

Even as they talked a messenger came seeking M.A. Achen. “The Patriarch wants to see you,” he said.

This was disturbing. Everyone was anxious to know more about the Patriarch’s intentions. They sincerely hoped nothing unpleasant would happen.

The Patriarch was obviously in an ugly mood as he reclined in his chair. Mar Coorilos and Konat Malpan and the foreign Rambans stood silently behind him. As soon as he saw Achen the Patriarch angrily asked, “What have you been teaching the Seminarians? It looks as if you have been misrepresenting facts. I understand you have been teaching them that Bishops have the right to make

consecrated oil and consecrate new bishops. Is that true?"

M.A. Achen was not surprised by the accusation. In fact he had fully expected this to happen. Some student had been carrying tales. However, his conscience was clear. He had not taught anything that was questionable.

"I have not taught them anything about consecrating oil," he answered calmly. "I have been teaching them about the ordination of senior clergy."

"And what made you go into this topic?"

He knew the Patriarch's followers were eagerly waiting to see him trapped and punished. He looked at them for a minute before answering very calmly, "I was merely teaching them the canons of the Church."

There was nothing more to be said. Everyone knew how well-versed Achen was regarding the Church Law.

The wily Patriarch wryly smiled and turned to Konat Malpan. "This man is a veritable sea of knowledge."

Then he turned to M.A. Achen and said, "You have been forgiven. Kneel down for a blessing."

"I have done no wrong. All the same I need your blessing." After the blessing Achen left the room slowly.

Once again a meeting of the Malankara Association had been organized. All the representatives gathered at the appointed place. M.A. Achen was the only hope. Only he could argue a case or present matters suitably. Slowly he rose to speak.

"———whatever rights are owing to the Patriarch must be accorded to him in full. However, no new rights should be accorded to him."

There was loud applause at that. M.A. Achen continued unfazed. "At first the Patriarchs had only the moral right to guide our thinking. But slowly they began to take a hand in administration and now Patriarch Abdullah has come threatening us with excommunication. He has also threatened to wreak the same fate that overtook Mar Ivanios of Jerusalem, on our bishop. And yet our laws are specific on these issues. No one can be excommunicated unless the general body demands it. It is now that your help is most required."

The applause was once again loud. There was no doubt on whose side the audience was. "Once not too long ago, a Patriarch

excommunicated a priest. The priest begged to be reinstated but the Patriarch did not accede to it. What did the priest do? He informed the bishops about his predicament and they promptly spoke to the Patriarch about it. Nothing moved him. He remained adamant. The bishops then decided to disregard the excommunication and instead consecrated him as their new Patriarch.”

It was a speech that aroused the loyalty of the audience and united them. They were now prepared to go any lengths to achieve their ends.

The Patriarch and his friends understood the response and went to every church they felt was likely to support them. Many people signed the document of allegiance out of fear of the Patriarch. Mar Coorilos had also signed it hoping to become the Malankara Metropolitan. But the Patriarch had set his sights on Mar Dionysius for unless he signed the document, the Patriarch would not achieve his dream.

But he had to make sure of all his supporters before he did this, so he called his sympathizers to Kottayam for a meeting. He had managed to take possession of many of the rooms of the Old Seminary for his own use and had in fact taken possession of the valuable documents and wealth stored in them. He also ordered Mar Coorilos and Konat Malpan to occupy all the vacant rooms on the northern side. Mar Osthathios took up residence in the room on the southwestern corner. And on the pretext of providing companionship to the foreign Rambans, Ramban Ougen also took up residence there. There were only a couple of rooms vacant on the southern side, other than the ones occupied by the Metropolitan. As soon as he heard that the Patriarch's people were trying to take over the Old Seminary, M.A. Achen moved from his rooms in M.D. School to a vacant room next to the Metropolitan's in the Old Seminary. Then he arranged for Deacon Philipose to occupy another vacant room. The latter was only too happy to do so, as he was anxious to learn the laws of the Church from M.A. Achen. The bold deacon in his turn was a great support to Achen.

The rooms and other property of the old Seminary might have been appropriated by the Patriarch, but that did not faze Vattasseril Mar Dionysius. So the Patriarch decided to confront Thirumeni with some hard decisions he had taken “We are telling you for the last

time. Unless you sign the agreement papers you will find yourself repenting for it.”

“I am not in the habit of chopping and changing,” said Thirumeni very firmly. “Once I have made up my mind on an issue, I do not change it.”

The Patriarch was beside himself with anger. “Ingrate!” he roared. “Do you know who you are dealing with? If I could ordain you, I also know how to excommunicate you.” In his rage he actually stamped his foot.

Thirumeni made no comment, but calmly walked away to his own room. But calm he was not, for his hands were trembling with rage.

Nor did he keep quiet. He knew the Managing committee was on his side except for the two trustees, Konat Malpan and C.J. Kurien. He decided to remove them from their posts as soon as possible. The choice fell upon the Father Mani Paulose of Palappallil from the clergy and Korula Abraham of Chirakadavil from the laity and they were then made joint trustees of the Church by popular vote.

With that the split became obvious. There were now two definite parties in the Old Seminary. The Patriarch and his people prepared for war. Konat Malpan and C.J. Kurien were the army generals in the forefront. They were prepared to take any kind of step to achieve their ends. In fact Konat Malpan so far forgot himself that he began to carry a gun in the pocket of his cassock. He closely watched every move that Thirumeni made. Even Kurien who was not as nimble as he was because of his rheumatism, was in no way in the background. He had even entrusted the publishing of the English newspaper, “West Star” in Trivandrum to a sub-ordinate and had taken up residence in the Old Seminary to fight for his party. He had also inducted a close relative into his group, a thorough bad hat, named Akkare Pappan to help him. They certainly shared the same ferocious temper.

Both parties filed suits in the court claiming the land and the building called the Old Seminary on it, and pursued their cases.

While they waited for the outcome of the case, the Patriarch decided to cinch matters by excommunicating Vattasseril Mar Dionysius. Accordingly the Patriarch wrote out the excommunication order and gave it to Konat Malpan who had it printed in the Julios press in Pambakuda.

The papers were to be served to Thirumeni in the next room. But who would take it to him? And even if someone had the temerity to serve the papers would it have any validity? Would there be proof of its having been served to the Metropolitan? The wily Patriarch decided to send it by registered post. And then he made Mar Coorilos, the head of the Malankara Church.

Vattasseril Mar Dionysius received the excommunication papers and read it by the light of the hurricane lantern. He was not easily shaken but today a furious rage filled him. Normally he had a tremor in his hand but today it shook violently, and darkness filled his eyes so that he could not see. He shouted loudly to Deacon Philipose of Cheppad who was at that moment returning from his evening bath in the river. The deacon was alarmed and ran in. "Go quickly and ask Panikar Achen to come here," roared the Bishop.

M.A. Achen was not always available in the Old Seminary as he had full charge of the M.D. Seminary and there was much to look into there. That day he happened to be in the High School. The deacon was not sure what he should do, for Thirumeni looked terribly ill, and his hand was trembling violently. A faint suspicion was confirmed when he saw the registered letter in Thirumeni's hand. And then he heard Konat Malpan's voice. "It doesn't matter who you call for. No one can undo the excommunication."

The deacon had no doubts left. The Patriarch had excommunicated their beloved Thirumeni. Without even waiting for a torch or lantern he ran in the dark to the M.D. Seminary. He did not notice the drizzling rain or the puddles on the road as he ran. He found M.A. Achen teaching his seminarians in his bungalow by the light of a dim hurricane lamp.

"Whatever is the matter?" he asked the dripping deacon.

"Thirumeni has been excommunicated by the Patriarch," the deacon gasped out. "He got the notice by registered post this afternoon. He has asked you to go to him immediately."

Achen stopped teaching and got up to accompany the deacon back to the Old Seminary. "Each one of you should make your way to the Old Seminary immediately," he told his astonished students. Then he called K.V. Chacko and A.Philipose and sent a message to Mammen Mappillai at the Manorama Press to join him at the Old Seminary. It was not easy for the latter to move much as he had

rheumatism, but that would not keep him home in such a crisis.

The problem was too great for them to be bothered by the rain. They came soaking wet to the Bishop to do what they could. They found him having dinner with Father Mattakkal in attendance. M.A. Achen went forward and kissed Thirumeni's hand and sat beside him. The others hung around, finding seats where they could, in the room or outside on the verandah. Thirumeni pulled the excommunication order out of his pocket and quietly gave it to Achen who read it at once.

He was disgusted by the undignified tone of the order. The Patriarch seemed to have no respect for a man in Holy Orders, but had addressed him in very common terms. "You are no longer a bishop or a priest. We do not consider you to be a man in Holy Orders."

"What on earth does this mean?" Achen said to himself. "Doesn't the Patriarch know any better? A priest may be excommunicated, but the sacrament bestowed on him remains. That is something that cannot be taken away from anyone. If it could be taken away then any excommunicated priest would have to be given Holy Orders again if and when the excommunication was lifted."

Achen frowned and looked at the Bishop for a minute as he proceeded to read the letter. The Patriarch had referred to Thirumeni as the Pharaoh of Malankara. How could he have been compared to the Pharaoh of Egypt who had treated the Israelites so mercilessly. Had he said stubborn and unyielding he might have conceded the point, but not this comparison. If Thirumeni was sure of his ideas, he was not likely to change, no matter who opposed him. Achen was proud to be known as the student of such a man. But he was no Pharaoh. No, never.

Suddenly Achen was aware of something else. Thirumeni looked fearless and serene. It seemed he had made up his mind to face any and every eventuality. There was no looking back. Achen went back to reading the letter from where he had stopped. He had to find out the reasons for the excommunication.

The reasons cited were many. The Metropolitan was disobedient; he was lavish in his use of public funds; he was squint-eyed; his hands trembled—. Achen folded the letter and returned it. He did not feel like reading it anymore.

"Your Grace's physical weaknesses seem to be the basis of the

accusations. It is regrettable that our spiritual leader has sunk so low,” said Achen.

“I am no longer upset by this turn of events. Our Patriarch had but one bullet to his gun, which he has used. That is all,” said Thirumeni calmly as he got up from the dining table.

Just then Advocate John of Elenjikkal entered the room. Whenever the Church had a problem he would leave all his work in Trivandrum and come to Kottayam to see how the problem could be solved. “I have just been to see the Patriarch. I’m afraid I was rather blunt in my speech. I told him this excommunication is neither spiritual or worldly. That it was merely devilish. If he wanted to excommunicate someone he could go ahead and excommunicate me. I would then show him what would happen. I couldn’t help myself, I was so angry.”

No one had ever seen Advocate John so angry. He was such a calm man, but now he was furious. M.A. Achen put his hand on the advocate’s shoulder and smiled gently. “Do you have to get so upset by this excommunication order? Just regard it as a childish expression of petulant anger. No valid reason has been given here to take such an extreme step. The Patriarch should have called together a meeting of the Synod of bishops to discuss the matter before issuing such an order. Three bishops are required to consecrate a bishop, so one man alone cannot excommunicate one.”

Those who were standing outside slowly began to move into the room to hear Achen who knew the church laws inside out. “If anyone is to be excommunicated he has to be given a memo regarding his offensive behaviour. Has any valid accusation been levelled at our Metropolitan? According to this order, the fact that Thirumeni needs help because of the trembling in his hands is held up as a major reason. Don’t our aged Patriarchs move aside and sit down in the middle of Mass and ask someone else to carry on? Moreover physical problems are not a hindrance to the clergy according to our canon laws. As a matter of fact the Patriarch knew very well about Thirumeni’s trembling hands when he consecrated him. How can he object now?”

“We might ignore this order, but the Patriarch’s people are not going to do so,” said Thirumeni. “We might be forcibly evicted from here. Wouldn’t it be better to call a meeting of the Managing Committee now?”

Before Achen could reply Advocate John said, "I heard a rumour that this order was going to be read out from the pulpit tomorrow in church. We have to think of ways and means to counteract that."

Deacon Philipose who had remained silent up to now came forward now and said, "I undertake to see that it is not read out in church tomorrow."

"And how do you plan to do that?" asked his guide and mentor, M.A. Achen. He wondered if his students were planning to disturb the service. That would be most unforgivable.

At once the deacon from Cheppad went to the other students crowding the door and whispered to them. Achen could see their faces brightening as they nodded their heads in agreement. Then the deacon turned round and elucidated his plan.

"As soon as the Patriarch starts reading the excommunication order, we shall shout Kyrie Elaison as loudly as we can. Shouting Kyrie Elaison at the most solemn moments of the Mass cannot be regarded as unwarranted."

Everyone agreed to this suggestion and after some small talk, the people all left. It was close to midnight then. Soon it would be Sunday morning.

Overnight the news of the excommunication had spread like wildfire. People belonging to both parties came to attend the Holy Communion service in the Old Seminary that Sunday morning. Those owing allegiance to the Patriarch all looked happy, but those owing allegiance to Thirumeni looked clearly upset. Many had concealed weapons under their clothes and intended to use them if the order were read out.

There was not even standing room in the church, so quite a large number of people crowded outside the doors or hung about in the courtyard. No one was much bothered by the fact that Mass was about to be said. They kept talking to each other, some in whispers, and others not so discreet, fairly loudly, in language not quite in keeping with the premises.

The Patriarch accompanied by Mar Coorilos and Konat Malpan entered the church, but C.J. Kurien who was also of the party hung outside the church to find out the mood of the people. M.A. Achen came in after the service had started, as he had to come from the M.D.Seminary. He went straight to the chancel where he found the

Patriarch seated in his chair, with Konat Malpan standing close by. A few minutes later the deacon from Cheppad came to the side door of the chancel and signalled to M.A. Achen. He looked pregnant with some big news, so Achen joined him at the door.

“In his hurry to be in church on time, the Patriarch forgot to lock his room,” the deacon said, quite excited. “All the papers and money which he and his people took from us, along with all his keys are there in the room. There is no one there. Shall I have them all removed?”

“No.”

The deacon had not expected this answer, and was clearly frustrated. “Then I shall collect them all and throw them into the river,” he muttered. M.A. Achen objected rather forcefully. “That is not our way. Don’t do anything foolish. God will return to us whatever has been stolen from us.”

The deacon went away and took his place among the Seminary students.

Achen found it difficult to concentrate that day. There were too many disturbances. Too many voices saying different things. He stood in a corner and was trying hard to concentrate, when he noticed a plump, white hand holding out a bit of folded paper to Konat Malpan through the window. Achen looked out of the window and saw it was C. J. Kurien. Konat Malpan opened the note and read its contents, then leaned forward and whispered to the Patriarch. He then tore up the note, rolled it up and threw it into the corner of the chancel.

M.A. Achen had seen it all. He had to know what the contents of the note were. He inched his way towards the corner and then quietly pulled the rolled up pieces of paper towards him with his foot. Without anyone noticing it he put the pieces together and read the note.

“Do not read the excommunication order.”

It was Kurien’s handwriting. Achen carefully stored the pieces away in his pocket and heaved a sigh of relief. They would not have to fear anything for the time being.

Chapter 11

He might have been excommunicated, but his head was still unbowed. As the Metropolitan had the full support of the Managing Committee, the Patriarch could not, much to his chagrin, oust him from the Old Seminary. That set the Patriarch thinking on other lines. He eyed the land surrounding the Old Seminary and entrusted the task of taking possession of it, to his favourite C. J. Kurien. It was prize land, too. The coconut palms were heavy with fruit and Kurien was only too happy to snatch the spoils. However, a man with a bad leg like him could not do much, so he sent for his relative Akkare Pappan, who entered the property with a group of his workers, well prepared to pick the coconuts. Acting as cheerleaders, Mar Coorilos, Konat Malpan and Kurien stood in the back verandah of the second floor watching the progress of the takeover.

Some of the men shinned up the palms and started cutting down the nuts. Hearing the thud of the coconuts as they hit the ground, Mattakkal Achen ran out challenging the miscreants. Akkare Pappan leaped forward and caught the unfortunate priest by his beard and pulled it, causing him to scream in pain. The scream aroused Vattasseril Thirumeni who went to the back window to find out what the commotion was all about. What he saw infuriated him. Not only were people stealing coconuts and maltreating a priest, but there was Konat Malpan and his friends on the back verandah, cheering them on. Thirumeni picked a good, stout cane from his room and went out to the back verandah silently. The fact that the Malpan was wont to carry a gun in his pocket worried him not at all. He crept upto the Malpan and lifting the cane with both hands brought it down sharply on the Malpan's back.

The Malpan screamed in pain as he turned round. Kurien limped between the two and held out his hand in protest.

"Do not be angry, Your Grace," he pleaded.

"I'll give you your grace," said Thirumeni furiously. "Call off that fellow who is beating Mattakkal Achen, if you are a man," he said and struck off the pleading hand.

By this time the student deacons had run out and were fighting

with the miscreants. The vanquished thieves were forced to retire without the coconuts. But that night there was fresh trouble. As the students sat studying in their rooms, they heard the sound of stones being pelted at the building. They fell against the windows and doors and even on the roof, breaking the tiles. Someone was using abusive language against the people in the Seminary. M.A. Achen quietly walked out in the dark to see what was happening. There were about twenty-five rowdies perched on the compound walls, obviously hoping to frighten away Vattasseril Thirumeni and his friends. Achen went back to his room and immersed himself in prayer.

The news spread like wildfire, and in a highly exaggerated form. It was rumoured that Thirumeni was beaten by the Patriarch's people and that naturally set the blood of the loyalists boiling. They converged upon Kottayam, determined to drive away the Patriarch and his followers.

That brought the police on the scene. The government ordered all the churches in Kottayam to be closed. Even the doors of the chapel in the Old Seminary were closed and sealed.

The Patriarch group engaged a few Muslim rowdies to keep watch over the Seminary. They came with knives and cudgels and established themselves on the second floor verandah. One Kamaluddin, a prime suspect in a murder case was their leader. Life became difficult for the Metropolitan and M.A. Achen who could not venture out onto the verandah without these rowdies hurling abuse at them and even obstructing their path. The people feared for the lives of their spiritual leaders and felt that some action was necessary. They decided to approach M.A. Achen.

"We have to engage bodyguards for you and Thirumeni," they told Achen.

M.A. Achen shuddered at the thought. Desecrate the beautiful, peaceful grounds of his beloved Seminary with bullies spouting abuses? It was unthinkable, disgraceful. However, the Metropolitan had to be protected from the assaults of the bullies brought in by the Patriarch's people, and the feelings of the loyalists had to be taken into account, too. Unhappily, he agreed to their suggestion and looked out for suitable people to employ as bodyguards. Learning of the existence of a suitable person in Tiruvalla, he set out to investigate him. It was wet weather and the rivers were in spate and even the

grounds of the Seminary were flooded. It would not be easy to go on foot, so a boat was hired for the purpose.

His family back home had heard of his problems and had sent his younger brother, Mathai Panikar to him. So it was that they set out together for Tiruvalla, from M.D. Seminary hoping to stop at the Old Seminary before continuing on their way.

The Patriarch's people must have heard of Achen's mission, for Achen found his way blocked by Kamaluddin and his party. There they stood in the muddy water with their *dhoties* hoisted high, intent on preventing Achen from continuing on his way. As the boat came up to them, Kamaluddin and his friends spread out preventing the boat from moving forward. They also shouted obscenities at Achen.

Achen sat in the boat seemingly oblivious of the situation. But Mathai's blood boiled. He sprang up angrily shaking his fists at them. M.A. Achen tugged at his shirt and he sat down grumbling. At once Kamaluddin moved to the side of the boat and lifting his leg high, he splashed the muddy water on to the boat's passengers. Mathai Panikar, seeing his brother's white clothes all covered in mud sprang up and jumped into the muddy water intent on teaching the rowdies a lesson. Kamaluddin pulled out a wicked looking knife.

"My God," said Achen and breathed a prayer. Suddenly he burst out laughing much to everybody's surprise. Everyone stood staring at him expectantly to find out what had made him laugh in such a situation. The fight went out of everyone. Achen pulled Mathai into the boat and no one objected when the boatman began to row again.

A few hours later the boat reached Peringara, near Tiruvalla where their quarry lived. Attupurath Varkey Varghese, generally known as *Ana*¹ Pappy, was a well known man with a wrestler's figure. There was no one to compare him with for size and general appearance. His skin looked as if he had rubbed soot and oil into it. His legs were like the trunk of palm trees, and when he walked it seemed as if the earth shook. His round red eyes glared at people.

M.A. Achen hired *Ana* Pappy as the Metropolitan's special bodyguard and took him back to the Old Seminary. In the meantime, about twelve parishes had each sent a good man to act as bodyguard

1 *Ana*: elephant

to their Thirumeni. However none of them, from either side, were the match of Pappy. Not even Kamaluddin, the killer dared to look him in the eye.

When he felt hungry, Pappy would go down to the banks of the River Meenachil and cook and eat a simple meal of rice gruel there. All the other bodyguards also cooked and ate on the sands of the river, but they all kept at a healthy distance from him. The various boatmen who came and went, and the petty shopkeepers all looked at him with awe, but did not interfere with him.

Every night the two groups of bodyguards would take up positions in the corridor outside the rooms of the Metropolitan and the Patriarch. One night M.A. Achen was awakened by loud shouts. Someone was screaming in fear. He sat up and heard someone call out in Syriac that he was being murdered. He turned up the wick of his lantern and went out.

It was an astonishing scene. About eight or ten men had surrounded someone who was screaming. In the light of the lantern he recognized an elderly Ramban who had come with the Patriarch, and who was being held by one of the Patriarch's bodyguards.

"Why are you holding this man prisoner?" he asked the men.

"We heard someone creeping about in the dark and thought it was a thief," said one of the men, sheepishly.

"What were you doing outside?" Achen asked the old priest gently in Syriac.

"I am a diabetic and I wanted to empty out this full chamber pot," said the old priest. "But these men caught me and made me spill the contents all over this place."

Achen burst out laughing and so did the others when he had translated for them. They cleaned up the place in good humour and went off to clean themselves.

Now that *Ana* Pappy had taken charge as the Metropolitan's special bodyguard, Achen felt he could go back to the M.D. Seminary. He had been neglecting his work there of late and things had piled up. He spoke to Thirumeni and the latter agreed. "Better collect all our important papers and take them back with you to your bungalow. They will be safe there," said the Metropolitan.

Accordingly he collected all the important papers and put them into a stout wooden box and set out for his bungalow. Deacon

Philipose of Cheppad carried the wooden box to Achen's carriage and they both got in. As they entered the bungalow, Achen said, "You had better sleep in my room from now on."

Rather surprising from a man who preferred solitude, but the deacon understood the gravity of the situation. Achen might want to spend half his nights reading, sleep for a short while, then wake up to sit in prayer and meditation for long periods, but the times were not good. He had important papers with him, very valuable to both groups. The enemy would be on the lookout for opportunities to steal them from him, and he, the deacon, would be expected to do his best to guard them.

The enemy struck as expected. In the dead of night when everyone was fast asleep a few of the Patriarch's bodyguards arrived at the priest's bungalow, and found his room. One of them slid his hand into the ventilation and slipped the bolt off its hook and opened the window. Then one by one they quietly entered his room. One of them carried a big sack and two others had sharp machetes with them. The priest and the deacon were fast asleep. One of the men lifted his machete to strike at the head of the priest, but the other objected. "Only if they wake up," he whispered.

In the dim light of the lantern they searched the room and found the wooden box containing the papers, and bore it off. They went back the same way they had come. Some sound or perhaps the fresh air from the open window woke up the deacon who could not quite take in what was happening. When he did, he woke up the priest and the latter tried to give chase, but found the room locked from the outside. He promptly shouted out for the manager.

The manager, Chacko, woke up with a start and woke Deacon Joseph of Valakuzhy. He heard Deacon Philipose call out, "thief—thief."

Chacko and Joseph ran out and gave chase. In no time at all they had overcome the thieves and had taken possession of the valuable wooden box which they brought back triumphantly and handed over to M.A. Achen.

Achen did not sleep that night. He lay awake thanking God for having given him a fresh lease on life. Had Deacon Philipose woken up a mite earlier, both of them would have been dead by now. What could two unarmed men do against armed men? But nothing had

happened and both their lives had been spared. The priest then remembered another time in the distant past when his life had been spared.

He was only three and a half years old then. He had run out of the house hearing the sound of their bullock cart being driven into their yard. The cart driver had picked up the little fellow and had set him on the shaft and had slowly driven the cart forward. For some reason the bulls panicked and in the process the little boy had fallen between the wheels. In another second he would have been run over, but it was as if someone had forcibly brought the cart to a halt an inch away from the fallen boy. He had often heard his father and mother praising God and thanking Him with tears in their eyes for saving the life of their little son.

"You have saved me once again, Lord," he prayed. "It seems You have some purpose for me. Whatever it is Lord I am ready. I am not afraid to live or die. All I want is to fulfil Your wishes." He spent the rest of the night in prayer.

The matter would have to be reported to the Metropolitan. But it was evening before he could set out as he had his classes to attend to. So after his classes he donned his cap and picked up his carved walking stick and set out in his horse driven carriage. With him went another priest.

He stopped the carriage outside the Old Seminary. The rascals were seated on the wall, but he paid no heed, but walked in and went straight to the Metropolitan.

"So glad you could come," said Thirumeni. "Do sit down. We have something important to tell you."

M.A. Achen sat down.

"The Patriarch has gone to Trivandrum to meet the British Resident."

"Why?" queried the priest.

"It seems he wants the interest that is to be paid on our deposits. Mar Coorilos, Konat Malpan and C. J. Kurien say it belongs to them."

"That cannot be allowed. We must go and see the Resident."

"We have decided to do so. If necessary we shall go to the Governor in Madras, or file a suit. We shall not return without doing something in the matter. In the meantime, we entrust all matters concerning the Church to you."

These deposits were the sole mainstay of the Church. A hundred years ago, the then head of the Church had deposited three thousand coins of the period with the East India Company, and ever since then the main source of income for the Church had been the interest paid on it. It was the eight per cent interest paid on this deposit that helped maintain the Seminaries in Kottayam and paid for the expenses of the seminarians. Each seminarian paid two rupees every month for his expenses, which was nothing at all. The Government paid a meagre grant for the M.D.High School which was not enough to cover the expenses of the High School. It was the interest paid on the money deposited with the East India Company that paid for all their expenses. They couldn't possibly allow that source to be withdrawn.

"That money must come to us," said the priest stubbornly. "We need that money for so many of our plans. I intend to make M.D.Seminary into a Grade I college. I do not know why, but many of my plans for it seem to go awry," he mused.

"What has happened?" asked the Metropolitan curiously.

"Well, Your Grace knows that I have always held that only celibate priests, dedicated to their profession can devote their lives to develop the school as it should be developed. For that reason I had sent four young seminarians, all four of them deacons, to Trichinopoly to complete their education at my expense. One of them died and the other three got married," he said a trifle bitterly.

"Do not worry on that score. There will always be stumbling blocks in the path of great projects. But someday you will achieve your object."

"But what will I do for the money? I depended on the annual interest that we received."

The Metropolitan was silent for a while. "We have an idea. We share the same name. Geevarghese. And many of our people have the same name. Why don't we ask every man named Geevarghese to send some money to us to help us in our hour of need? What do you say?"

"Good idea. I would go a step further and involve our lady members, too. Every woman named Mary should send what she can to the cause."

"Very good. We entrust the whole project to you. Let us make

a beginning right now with our contributions.”

“I do not have much money with me now. Your Grace knows I have no savings whatsoever. Let me see what I can save from the money set aside for the expenses of the deacons. I shall make my contribution a while later.”

“No problem. You are the biggest asset of the Church.”

Dusk was falling when they ended their conversation. The priest was anxious to reach the M.D. Seminary before it became much darker. He had barely travelled half the distance when the carriage stopped.

“What’s the matter?” asked the priest leaning forward.

The driver did not say anything. The priest looked into the gloom. He could not make out much but he realized that there were a few people obstructing his way. Someone had caught the reins of the horse. It must be the rascally guards of the Patriarch. What could he do? There was no one on the road he could call for help. He could neither run nor fight them. He wasn’t going to give in easily, however.

“What’s the matter with you, driver? Go on,” he ordered.

But the driver did not have the courage to do that. Immediately the rascals surrounded the carriage. The priest then recognized the man who held the reins. It was Kamaluddin, a man wanted by the police for murder.

“What do you think you are doing? Let go of the horse,” he ordered.

There were only ribald comments and laughter in response. Kamaluddin pulled out a dagger and pointing it at the priest he said harshly, “Get out of the carriage.”

“Why?”

“I am the Patriarch’s bodyguard, and I do not intend to allow you to carry away any papers from his office. Get down and take off your cassock.”

Kamaluddin came nearer with his gleaming knife.

“No.”

“Think so?” Kamaluddin surged forward and reached out to snatch the priest’s cassock, but what he caught hold of was the priest’s carved walking stick. It was a beautifully carved stick and the priest had no intentions of forsaking it. Both the men struggled over it unable to let go, when suddenly the priest felt an inner voice telling him

to let go. He did and Kamaluddin fell back heavily on the ground with the stick in his hand. That was enough for him and he called his men off.

What a relief! The driver found his strength and urged his horse on. The horse seemed to fly as they went on and soon they reached the safety of the bungalow.

Chapter 12

M.A. Achen was an extremely worried man. He was worried about his guide and mentor, the Metropolitan. Achen had never before seen him flinch at any sight nor be shaken by any news, but now His Grace was clearly upset. The sword of excommunication hung over him and something would have to be done about that. Neither of them could see a way out of the coil. He, M.A. Achen, must find a way out. What greater gift could he make to the man who had shaped his life and career for him! Perhaps this was why his life had been spared on so many occasions. He thought about it constantly, whether he was engaged in his work, or eating or resting. There was a way, but how far it would be successful was anybody's guess.

Patriarch Abdul Massiha would have to be brought to Malankara immediately. He would have to be invited as the real Head of the Church. There was only one way to establish that. He would have to establish a Catholicate here in Malankara. Once that was done the services of no Patriarch would be required. The Catholicos would then have all the right required to consecrate new bishops and he could govern the Church with a synod of bishops to help him.

There was a snag in the plan. A new Catholicate cannot be created. An existing Catholicate could however be transferred to this country and someone ordained for it. As he mulled over this plan he realized that even this was possible. The Catholicate in Tigris in Mesopotamia had no incumbent. In fact the Catholicate had been lying vacant for over a hundred years. Moreover, it was a Catholicate that belonged to the Eastern Orthodox Church. There was nothing in the canonical laws to prevent such a transfer. Hadn't the Patriarchate of Antioch been shifted to Mardin? And until the year 231 A.D. the Catholicate of Tigris itself was in Seleucia.

M.A. Achen did not waste time once he had thought out the matter. He at once took pen and paper and wrote a detailed account of what Patriarch Abdullah had done in India, and its repercussions and posted it to Patriarch Abdul Massiha. He would have to hold his soul in patience. After all, the letter would have to travel over land and sea before it reached its destination and the very old Patriarch

Abdul Massiha would then have to take a decision. He mustered all the patience he had.

Even as he lay down for a well-deserved rest he could not relax. Problems chased each other in his mind. Vaguely he heard the chatter of the seminarians as they prepared for bed and realized that it was late. He then remembered his beautiful carved walking stick which Kamaluddin had snatched from him and regretted its loss. But that was yesterday. Who knows what the morrow would bring, he thought as he began to slide into sleep.

Suddenly the door burst open and Deacon Philipose rushed into his room unceremoniously. Something had upset him violently, for he was soaked in sweat.

“*Ana* Pappy has been murdered.”

“My God,” exclaimed Achen as he sprang out of bed. “Where? And how—?” He had never been so shocked.

“At the boat jetty....”

“Pick up the lantern and let’s go.”

“It is late, Achen. No, don’t go out.”

“Nothing will happen unless the Lord wills it. Let’s go immediately.”

Deacon Philipose picked up the lantern and followed him.

They took the difficult shortcuts they knew and somehow reached the boat jetty. It was deserted. There were boats anchored at the pier, but no boatmen. There was not a soul in that normally crowded place. Even the huts, where the Muslim bodyguards cooked their food, were deserted. The tea stalls also were shut. Everyone had fled the scene.

Then in the gloom they saw an old man seated on the sands. They decided to speak to him.

“Did you see it happen?”

“Oh, yes.” He pointed to a spot and said, “Right there. They beat him to death there.”

“Where is the body then?”

“They have taken him to the hospital. They can’t have reached the place yet.”

“How did it happen? Who killed him?”

“Kamaluddin and his friends. There were seventeen of them to one Pappy. Pappy was sitting in that stall having a cup of coffee

when all seventeen of them entered the place and started abusing him. Pappy was not one to bear it for long. He took a swipe at the nearest one and kicked each one as they came up. They all tumbled out of the shop and the fight went on in earnest, Pappy alone against the others. They had come prepared with swords and cudgels and they soon surrounded him and beat him down with their cudgels. It was awful. I cannot bear to think about it."

M.A. Achen listened in silence. The old man went on.

"They were soon beating at his head. How long can even a Pappy hold out? He fell down but picked himself up and ran. Kamaluddin pulled out his sword and threw it at Pappy. It caught him on his leg and brought him down again. It was like some mountain falling. Those fellows went after him and beat his head to pulp." The old man was now openly crying.

By this time the police had arrived on the scene. M.A. Achen accompanied them to the hospital.

Ana Pappy had been rightly nicknamed. The huge body seemed to overflow on either side of the bed. Blood from his head covered his face and dripped down. The skull had broken in two places and the brain seemed to be oozing out. But he was not yet dead. There was a spark of life in him yet. His eyes seemed to be pleading with Achen as he lay there staring.

He lay thus till the next day. Whatever he wanted to say to Achen remained unsaid, but Achen never forgot those pleading eyes. He felt indescribably sad. Afterwards he felt that he should not have gone into the postmortem laboratory. He would never be able to forget the sight he saw there---the scalped head with the skull broken in thirteen places!

When he returned to his quarters he found a telegram awaiting him. Hurriedly he opened it. It was from Antioch, from Patriarch Abdul Massiha. It said, "Blessed be Mar Dionysius and his people. Abdullah's excommunication order is not valid."

Relief and happiness slowly spread through him. He set out for the Old Seminary as he wanted to share the news with the Metropolitan immediately. There were no signs of the Patriarch's bodyguards when he reached there, but the police were there inquiring about them.

The Patriarch and his friends were subdued. They feared for

their very lives if they continued there. Pappy's blood seemed to be crying out for vengeance. They quietly made plans for going back to their own country. What money they had garnered from the various parishes they had visited would have to suffice. Fourteen thousand rupees was a tidy sum. The Patriarch decided to go home.

M.A. Achen found the Metropolitan closeted with Advocate John of Elenjikkal, discussing certain points of law. The *Vattipanam*² case, as it became known, regarding the deposits in the East India Company, was going on. He himself was the fifty-first witness and the Metropolitan was the fifty-second. Achen held out the telegram to the Metropolitan, who could not quite believe his eyes when he read it.

The face that had looked so careworn now brightened as the message sank in. Tears of gratitude coursed down his cheeks as he looked at M.A. Achen who had done so much to help him. Achen himself was very moved. He had never before seen his beloved guide weep. The old man hugged Achen as he said brokenly, "You are the only real friend I've had."

Somehow Patriarch Abdullah heard about the telegram sent by Patriarch Abdul Massiha. He was all ready to leave the country, but he came to see the Metropolitan one last time. "If you think you can have the excommunication order cancelled, you can think again. It is all but impossible to bring Abdul Massiha to this country as he is in captivity there."

Patriarch Abdullah and his assistants who had come with him left quietly, with none of the fanfare they had enjoyed on their arrival. That however did not solve any of the problems created. His followers were still active here and somehow they would have to be subdued. Not by the means they had used but by the canonical laws. The only way to achieve that would be by creating a Catholicate here in Malankara. And for that Patriarch Abdul Massiha would have to come.

M.A. Achen wrote a second letter to Antioch, to Patriarch Abdul Massiha and received a favourable reply to that, too. How-

2 *Vattipanam*: the interest on a fixed deposit that the Malankara Church had made in the East India Company.

ever, the Patriarch wanted money to cover the travel expenses, a hundred pounds, in fact. Achen was perturbed by this request. Patriarch Abdullah had cleaned out the coffers before leaving. Where would he find a hundred pounds? The Metropolitan had a helpful suggestion to make.

“Take what you need from the funds of the Parumala Church. I want you to go to Bombay and receive the Patriarch and bring him here, yourself.”

The Patriarch would disembark at Karachi harbour and then travel to Bombay by train. Accordingly, the priest went to Bombay and waited for the train to arrive on the platform. The train did arrive and many passengers did get out but there was no sign of the Patriarch. Then he noticed a small group of people wearing Arab clothes and speaking the Arabic language walking towards the exit. There were two middle-aged men and one very old man, whose white beard foamed over his chest. Achen went up to them and spoke to them in English.

The old man turned round to see who it was who spoke like an Englishman and saw it was a priest. “You must be Father Geevarghese Panikar from Malankara,” he said in Syriac. Who else would come to meet him?

Both men had guessed correctly. Achen went forward and bowed respectfully and kissed the Patriarch’s hand. He was happy to meet the Patriarch who had come all the way from Antioch. Antioch, where the followers of Jesus Christ had first been called Christians.

The two men accompanying the Patriarch were Rambans.

In the hotel room the Patriarch changed into the robes and cap he normally wore. Without wasting time the group set out for Malankara. There was much to discuss. “As the real Patriarch of the Church cannot Your Holiness remove Patriarch Abdullah from his post?”

“You see we Patriarchs function under the Muslim chiefs of Turkey. They decide who has power and who has not,” he answered sadly.

“Is that how they treat Christians?” asked the priest.

“Christians have no rights in that country. They are not even allowed to attend church. If the church bells are rung, the sexton is jailed. We are expected to work on Sundays and worship on Fridays.

Moreover, during Ramzan, Christians are expected to fast like the Muslims.” The conversation then moved back to Patriarch Abdullah and the customs and manners of Antioch and so they spent their time learning a lot from each other.

At last they reached Cochin. Vattasseril Thirumeni was at the station to meet the Patriarch. After the exchange of greetings they decided to set out for Kottayam. And then came another hitch. This time it was C.J. Kurien who was responsible. He had brought a stay against the Patriarch entering Kottayam. The Patriarch had been de-recognized by the Turkish Government and he should not be allowed to enter Kottayam. There might be protests if he did so.

And so it was decided to go on to Parumala. The Patriarch himself was anxious to perform the ceremony as soon as possible. “Let there be no delay,” he urged the Metropolitan. “We can relax in peace afterwards.”

M.A. Achen invited a few responsible people to make the necessary arrangements. Many were happy when they heard of this honour that would be bestowed on Malankara, but there were others with serious doubts. Even his friend Advocate E. Philipose had some doubts.

“This Patriarch has been excommunicated by the Turkish Government. How then can he perform this ceremony for us? Will it have any validity? Does he have the right to do it?”

There was a mischievous twinkle in Achen’s eyes as he answered, “Didn’t the government of his time crucify our Lord Jesus Christ? Did that affect his status as our Saviour? What has been granted by our God cannot be taken away by the powers of this world.”

To all the people who expressed their doubts he offered such answers, and stilled all their doubts. The next question was choosing the right person. Who better than Mar Ivanios of Kandanad Diocese? A date was fixed and the venue would be the St. Mary’s Church in Niranom.

There were many arrangements to be made and there were not too many days for it. He decided to distribute the work. There was something else to plan, too. It was time that his student and roommate, Deacon Philipose of the Vanchiyil family in Chepad was ordained as a priest. M.A. Achen was very anxious that he be ordained

by Patriarch Abdul Massiha himself. Accordingly when the Patriarch reached Chepad during his tour of the churches in the Kollam district, he requested him to ordain his student and the Patriarch agreed and Deacon Philipose became Philipose Achen.

His hands were thus strengthened by the presence of another priest in his team. Father Philipose could be depended upon to carry out many of Achen's plans for the consecration.

It was startling news all right. No one had ever heard of the consecration of a Catholicate or the consecration of a Catholicos in Malankara. There were many for and against it and they all waited with bated breath for the great event. The opposition knew that once the Church here had a Catholicos, the excommunication order against Mar Dionysius would have no validity. They dreaded the forthcoming event and sought ways and means to prevent it.

Sunday, Fifteenth September, Nineteen hundred and twelve. The long awaited day had arrived. Long before the stipulated time the St. Mary's Church in Niranom and its grounds were filled with the thousands that arrived to witness the ceremony. There were people from faraway places who had travelled the day before and spent the night in the churchyard. The Church and its grounds were decorated with multi-coloured streamers that danced in the wind.

Mar Ivanios, the Bishop who would be ordained the Catholicos, the Metropolitan and another bishop Mar Gregorios arrived. Mar Dionysius went up to escort the Patriarch to the church for the ceremony and found him seated behind locked doors. He was stunned by what the Patriarch had to say at this last minute.

"My Rambans are against the creation of a Catholicate here in this country. Last night they quarrelled with me over this issue. They want the dominance of the foreigner to continue here, and we find it difficult to go against them," said the old man querulously.

Mar Dionysius felt helpless. What could he say? How would he persuade the Patriarch to even come out of his room? M.A. Achen was not available. He had gone to Mavelikara to attend to some urgent domestic problem, promising to return in time for the function. All he could think of was that Achen had not returned. But he had, and he raced to the Metropolitan's side.

"It is past the hour for the service to begin. What's the matter? Where is the Patriarch?" The clever priest had read the impatience in

the waiting congregation. The Metropolitan told him what had happened.

Nothing could have stunned him more. He stood there dumbly seeing all his towering plans falling to bits about him. With a tremendous effort he pulled himself together and went up to see the Patriarch and knocked forcefully at his door.

"Do not bother to call me. There is nothing we can do," said the old man plaintively.

"Your Holiness it is me, Father Geevarghese Panikar."

"My son—." He had not opened the door to anyone but now it was opened wide. He was pale with fear and obviously under great stress.

The priest kissed the old Patriarch's hands and then said, "Nothing can be more disgraceful, Your Holiness. How can the Head of this great Institution go back on his word so easily? Your Holiness had given it to me in writing that a Catholicate would be established here and a Catholikos ordained."

"We are even now willing for that, my son, but—" his voice trailed away.

"Then come on. Let us go to the Church."

"Wait a minute, my son. Last night my Rambans threatened me with murder if we carried out our plans. They told me plainly they would throw me overboard on our return journey if I did not listen to them. I do not want anything. I only want my life."

"These Rambans can do nothing, Your Holiness. Do not be frightened of them at all. Please listen to our pleas and perform this service for us."

"I'm sorry, but that is not very reassuring. Can you accompany me home? I must know that."

"I shall certainly accompany Your Holiness up to Bombay. I shall see Your Holiness on board the ship. I shall even escort Your Holiness home if Your Holiness so orders me. Is that not enough?"

But the Patriarch was not reassured. He had more doubts.

"I have some money on me, my son, and I do not trust our Rambans. I fear they will take my money away from me. I am old and weak."

"I understand. Take heart, Your Holiness. If I have life in me—I need not say more now. If Your Holiness returns home with—

out accomplishing what you came to do, it would be a tragedy, a great loss for this Church. Just look out of the window at the large crowds thronging the churchyard waiting for Your Holiness. Come, Let us go to the Church.”

“Very well.”

The Patriarch in his officiating robes and the priest in his snow-white cassock left the room together. It seemed to the Metropolitan that a great storm had passed over, and the skies were blue once again. He breathed more easily and forgetting where he was he hugged M.A. Achen in full public view.

It was a long service, but the large congregation was lost in the wonder of it. A new Catholicate was being consecrated and it was giving new life to an old church. And so the first Catholicos of the East was consecrated Baselios Paulose the first.

After the service M.A. Achen warned the Metropolitan. “This consecration has released Your Grace from the excommunication order of Patriarch Abdullah, but do not forget it is only a temporary measure. We have to get an order from Patriarch Abdul Massiha that this Church is fully autonomous. That is the only way to assure its permanency.”

The Metropolitan spoke to the Patriarch who quite willingly agreed. “Just give it to me in writing and I shall sign it.”

M.A. Achen sat down at once at a table and began to write. All the relevant details like consecration of bishops, the right to make holy oil, and succession of the Catholicos were taken into account. Lastly the people were advised to hold fast to their faith and the Church, built on the rock that was Peter. The document was handed over to the Patriarch who signed above his name, Abdul Massiha the Second, Patriarch Ignatius.

A new era was thus born in Malankara. And M.A. Achen who was responsible for this creation received all praise from the people. After a long time the church was free to conduct its affairs without outside interference.

Chapter 13

He travelled to Bombay again, this time to see that the Patriarch left the Indian shore safely. He had done his Church a great service and now it was time, he thought, to go back to the work of his choice. He wanted to concentrate on the M.D. Seminary. It mattered little to him that the Church had been split into two groups, the Patriarch's people and the Metropolitan's people. They were now popularly known as *Bava Kakshi*³ and the *Methran Kakshi*⁴. They might fight for some time but it would soon settle itself. He had more important work on hand.

That might be what he wanted to do, but Thirumeni had another job for him. Another long journey. "We have an invitation to go to Serampore in Calcutta," he said. "We have been invited to an all Christian gathering by one John R. Mott, a Protestant from America."

M.A. Achen had one question. "Why have we been invited to a Protestant gathering?"

"We are not the only ones to be invited. Representatives of the Mar Thoma Church, the C.M.S and other denominations have been invited. Spreading the Word of God according to the Bible in India is their aim."

"That is a good object. But do we really want to get mixed up in Protestant activities? Would that be good for us?"

"Do not forget that we are involved in a civil suit in court—the *Vattipanam* case. Now that we have a Catholicos in India we might not lose that case, but in case we do, don't you think a few friends would be a good idea? Financially we are at a very low point. They might be of help to us."

Both of them went to Serampore, to the famous Baptist College, a long whitewashed building built in the western fashion, where the meeting was to be held.

A representative of each denomination was expected to speak

3 *Bawa Kakshi*: the Patriarch's faction

4 *Methran Kakshi*: the Metropolitan's faction

at the meeting. When it was the turn of the Jacobite Church, it was M.A. Achen who rose to speak. The Metropolitan had insisted on that. Somehow the news that the architect of the newly created Orthodox Church would be speaking in English, had gone ahead of him so the large crowd cheered him as he walked up to the stage. They stared curiously at this young bearded priest, clad in snow-white robes who walked so confidently to the stage. They were even more taken aback when he put into words a problem that had long troubled him.

“The Apostle Thomas came to this country nineteen hundred years ago and spread the Gospel. But even today Christians form just two percent of the population. Why? Why hasn’t Christianity spread?”

The question struck at the hearts of the audience who settled down to hear more of what the priest had to say. He proceeded to inform them the reasons behind this failure, and embellished it with anecdotes from his experience. The speech was followed by debates, which revealed M.A. Achen’s ability to go to the heart of the matter and present his arguments in a very convincing way.

Dr. John Mott approached him personally with another white man in tow. After shaking hands with Achen, he introduced his friend. “This is Dr. Howells, Principal of Serampore College. He wants to discuss something with you. But before I leave you two together, I have something else to say.”

By this time the Metropolitan had joined them. Dr. Mott turned to the Bishop and said, “If your Church is prepared to work with us in evangelization we are prepared to give you Rs.50,000/- every year for ten years. In return you must submit the progress of your work for our inspection. Are you agreeable to this?”

Such an amount was unimaginable. It took their breath away. But having to submit accounts was unthinkable. If by some chance their report did not satisfy the unknown auditors it would be a disgrace to the Church. They could not possibly submit their independent Church to humiliation. The Metropolitan was very frank as he answered, “If you give us money we are prepared to use it for the purpose you have in mind. But you will have to trust us completely. Please do not ask us to submit accounts to you.”

“In that case we have no other option but to give up such plans,” replied Dr. Mott. He thought for a minute, then said, “There is an-

other matter which Dr. Howells will speak to you about.”

“Father Panikar, I wonder if you could come to us as Professor in this college. It would be a rare honour for this college.”

Dr. Howells had obviously been very impressed by his learning and ability to express himself.

Father Panikar thought about it. It was a wonderful offer. To be a Professor in the sole Christian University in India was a privilege indeed. He could carry on with his studies and he could impart the same to his students. But putting a distance between him and the M.D. Seminary was also unthinkable. He had not yet been able to carry out all his plans for the Seminary because of all the friction within the Church.

He found it difficult to answer, so he bought time by a smiling rejoinder. “It is for my Bishop to answer that question.”

It put the Metropolitan into a quandary. How could he reject the honour? If Panikar Achen took up the post it would be an honour for the whole Church. What, however, would he do without his right hand? He gave an evasive reply. “That is a wonderful offer, indeed. But there are several things to consider before we give a firm answer.”

It was not easy to reply to the many letters that Dr Howells sent him urging him to go to Calcutta. The split in the Church and the civil suit that followed was very troublesome to say the least, and how could he leave Thirumeni to handle it by himself. The latter had to make frequent appearances in court to give evidence and he, Panikar Achen, was the only one who could help him. There were strong rumours that the *Bava Kakshi* were prepared even for murder and in such a situation how could he leave for Calcutta?

On the other hand there were many advantages. When he thought of the promises that Dr. Howells had made him, he found it difficult to refuse. It would help the Church very greatly if he accepted it. Generally Indian professors were paid only half the salary that an Englishman was paid; however, he was promised the same salary and privileges that an Englishman would get. That would be about ten times the salary he got in M.D. Seminary. From his present salary he was educating four deacons. With the promised salary in Serampore he would be able to educate forty deacons. That itself would be a very great gain for the Church. If he could educate so many they

could in turn be made the teaching staff of the Bible College he planned to start.

A tug of war went on in his mind. Without Thirumeni's permission he could not accept the offer. On the other hand the thought of all that he could achieve if he accepted the offer, made it impossible to refuse. Even when he went to bed these thoughts kept him awake. Then he did the only thing possible. He surrendered the whole issue to God and found tremendous peace of mind.

It seemed to him that someone was urging him to go to Serampore, so he spoke to the Metropolitan about it. At first Thirumeni was unwilling, but after much thought he said, "Very well, go ahead and accept the offer."

There was not much time to lose. He was expected to join Serampore without much delay. But there were many things to attend to in M. D. Seminary alone. Who would run the school? Who better than K.V. Chacko who had been manager there for some time now. He was well educated and capable and had a stature of his own. Everything else would be managed by Chacko Kilileth.

Before he left he completed as much of the school's work as he could, then set about collecting a few addresses in Calcutta. His reluctance to leave showed in his parting words. "I must be kept informed of everything that happens here."

It was decided that someone should go with him to Serampore. He decided to take a favourite student——Deacon Yakub of Kalapurackal, an excellent student. He was an innocent young fellow and very popular among the students, and a favourite among teachers for his outstanding work in the classroom. He had passed the Matriculation examination and was now teaching in the M.D. Seminary, and would be an asset wherever he went. He adored M.A. Achen and was his constant shadow. If he went with him he could make sure the younger man proceeded with his higher education. The young deacon was only too willing to go with Achen to Serampore.

M.A. Achen was very neat and tidy, so there was no question of tidying up after him. All he did was to select his favourite books from the shelves and pack them. As he packed them he came across a packet of letters, carefully tied up. Some of them were angry letters from Mammen Mappillai, and others were threatening letters, often

using abusive language, from the Patriarch's camp. He had tied them up and put them away out of sight because they upset him so. He knew he should forgive them, but had found it hard to do so. Surely as a priest he should not harbour such ill-feelings towards his enemies?

He decided to burn them and so rid his mind of this burden. But he looked at the names of the writers for the last time before making a small pile of it in the garden and setting fire to it. As they burned to ashes he felt his ill-feelings melt away. He would be able to start his new life with a clean heart.

Before saying goodbye to everyone, he handed over the money he had with him. After sending expense money to the deacons he was educating in Trichinopoly, he had about three thousand rupees with him. He deposited this money collected from all who were named Geevarghese, into the Metropolitan's fund. He was grateful to God that he had been able to return to the Church some of the money that had been spent on his own higher education.

Vattasseril Mar Dionysius came out on to the verandah to say farewell to Panikar Achen. It was like cutting off a part of his body he thought. Achen had been the one to come to his rescue at all times. He just hugged his beloved student and then bade him farewell.

The doors of the famous Serampore University were opening its doors to the first Professor from Malankara. The management there had waited long for him, and it was Dr. Howells who personally welcomed him and escorted him to the second floor where rooms had been arranged for him. Deacon Yakub would share his quarters with him.

He was introduced to the staff there as the man who had initiated the creation of the Catholicate in Malankara and as such was received with great respect.

It did not take him long to familiarize himself with the place. The western architecture and the way it was well maintained, impressed him. The classrooms were uniformly big and the assembly hall was huge. He was even more impressed by the large library well stocked with books. What more could a book lover like him want! As he looked through the large stock of books in the library he recalled the words that Dr. Howells had said, "I would like you to teach two subjects, Father Panikar. Economics and the history of the

Church. There are any number of books on both the subjects in this library. You may choose any of them as your text. That's your privilege."

Which book should he select? He began looking through each one in his given subjects and came across Adrian Fortescue's "History of the Church." On reading it he felt that there was a totality about the work which the others lacked. Fortescue dealt with both the Catholic Church and other Churches in a very balanced manner. He wondered what people would say on hearing that he, a Jacobite, had elected to teach a book written by a Catholic. Then he thought of a suitable answer, "The Catholic Church is the only one that dates back to Jesus Christ. All other denominations were born out of disputes. So only a Catholic has the right to write such a book."

He made copious notes. He would teach his students to the best of his ability. No sacrifice would be too great to achieve his ends. It seemed to him that there was not enough time to do everything. He would wake up every morning at half past four, and sit down to study. He was always punctual about going to his class, not a minute too soon or too late. He was a very impressive figure in his snow-white cassock as he walked into class. As soon as the classes were over, he would make a beeline for the library. Never did he seek to kill time with his fellow teachers. He never noticed anything that happened around him once he started reading. He spent hours devouring the contents of the books in the library, and he urged his students to do the same, for he wanted them to go beyond the syllabus and seek more knowledge. He also knew the ability each student had, and he made each one stretch himself.

Every now and then he made them sit for tests and would correct each paper carefully. However, when he was not in the library he would be involved in all the activities of the college. He started a debating society for all those who had the ability, or the desire to speak in public, and encouraged them. From the peon to the Principal there was no one who did not admire him.

When he found that the authorities were prepared to give him whatever facilities he needed he asked Dr. Howells for a favour. "I would be grateful if you granted me two things. I already have two students studying here who came with me. I should like to bring a few more from my state. Please do not deny them admission on ac-

count of low marks. I will see it that they study well. Secondly, there are other Syrian Christians here and I would like to have a place where I can teach them the Bible, and worship in the way we are accustomed to."

"You are our asset, Father Panikar," said Dr. Howells without stopping to think. "It is for us to see that you get whatever you want."

Panikar Achen wrote to Mar Dionysius that night. He had a few names in mind whom he wished to promote. Deacons who would do well under such tuition. There was Deacon Joseph Valakuzhy, Mathews Paret, Pathrose Mookancheril, a few priests and other laymen. These men would be assets in the Church and should therefore be encouraged to study. He was sure Thirumeni would agree and send them for, after all, he had always acceded to his every wish.

The eagerly awaited reply arrived. The men he had requested were coming. He hired a double storied house in the neighbourhood for them to stay in and made sure they were admitted to the university.

Chapter 14

M.A. Achen had no income other than his salary and that would not stretch as far as he had thought it would. About twenty people lived on one man's income. He had young people studying not only in Serampore, but also in Ahmedabad and Madras, and each one needed money. It was not just the heavy fees that he paid. He also paid for their food and lodging, their clothes, and sundry expenses and found himself borrowing money to meet all the expenses. This won't do, he thought. He would have to find some other source to make the necessary amount. Going back on his commitments was something he stubbornly refused to consider.

And God showed him a way. The examinations were over and the Christmas vacation had started. Ten whole days. The European staff decided to go on a tour of the country and Dr. Howells asked him to be their guide.

He had never sought his own happiness nor had he found time to tour the country. He was not going to start now and regretfully told Dr. Howells so. "You know the responsibility I have shouldered, and I simply cannot afford such a tour. You must excuse me from this."

"What are you planning to do in the vacation, Father?"

"I have papers to value. In fact I wish I could examine the answer books in other subjects, too." The money he earned by valuing papers helped pay some bills, so he spent days and nights valuing them.

"Good Heavens," exclaimed Dr. Howells. Then thoughtfully he added, "You know something? We Europeans cannot work without a break as you do. This tour was intended to be just that—a break. We would be only too happy if you could undertake to do our work, too. Go ahead and value the English papers. There's just one thing, though,—"

Dr. Howells stopped a minute before going on. "You must take care of your health. I know how hard you work and I know how little rest you have. I know you are working for your Church, but it makes no difference. You must learn to relax."

It was not an unreasonable suggestion, he knew. It was all very well for Dr. Howells to tell him that he should eat good food, enjoy

himself, or even just rest from his work, but how could he fit it all in with his lifestyle and vocation? He intended to work as long as he had the health to do so. Who knew how long he would live? There was so much he wanted to do for his people, and so little time. He did not want to waste a minute of his life doing something for himself. Right now evaluating the answer books of his students was uppermost in his mind. That, and finishing the book he had started writing. A book on the forgiveness of sins for the spiritual growth of the faithful. So he only smiled when he heard Dr. Howell's comment.

His room was soon filled with answer books to be evaluated. It took him all of the vacation to finish them, but what did that matter? His income had increased. And that made him realize the need for keeping accurate accounts. Up to now he had not felt the need to do so, but now he called Deacon Yakub and entrusted the task to him. "Praise the Lord we have enough money for our needs, but we must know how it is spent. I want you to keep strict accounts and also deal with all money matters. I shall look at it when I have the time."

Saying that he drew out all the money he had and gave it to Deacon Yakub. He also gave him the list of students he was supporting. He had many plans in mind for the betterment of the Church. But the Church itself was in turmoil, going by the reports he got from A. Philipose and Mammen Mappillai. Educating a few young men and helping them rise to important positions was not going to be enough to improve society. For that he would have to do something for the women also.

He was fully aware that if nothing were done to uplift them and educate them, society would never improve. The women in Malankara were like slaves denied freedom and education. They had to be educated, and educated well. For that he would have to be on the lookout for help of the right kind. Until then all his plans would have to be held in abeyance.

He arranged for a room to be converted into a chapel in the house where the deacons lived. He met his students there and taught them as much as he could about the Bible and the history of the church. He also sat there in meditation for hours together. He had another room converted into a classroom where he taught the young deacons Syriac. Their professors were all Englishmen and quite naturally the students became very fluent in the English language. But

they were Syrian Christians, too, and they should not forget the language of their liturgy, Syriac. All the books related to the Church were also in that language, so it was necessary to drill them in Syriac and made them equally fluent in it. It also prompted him to collaborate on a text on the language that would make it easy for his students to study it in the absence of a teacher, titled, "Robinson's Grammar."

It was not a subject that was taught in Calcutta University so he went straight to the Vice-Chancellor and introduced himself. As soon as he heard the name, the Vice Chancellor looked up and asked him to sit down.

"I have heard of you from Dr. Howells. What can I do for you?"

"I am sure you are aware of the number of Syrian Christian priests and deacons who are students in this University. Their numbers will only increase in the future. They have to study Syriac but unfortunately no university teaches it. That's why I have come to you. I would like you to introduce Syriac as an optional subject."

"I believe you have already spoken of this to Dr. Howells, Father. He spoke to me about it. I have already placed the matter before the governing body. No one is against it, but some have raised a doubt. You see, there are not enough books on the subject available."

M.A. Achen held out a copy of "Robinson's Grammar" and said, "This book is good enough for students up to B.A. If you could kindly look into it and maybe say a word about it——. I was closely associated with its creation."

"In that case there is no problem," said the Vice-Chancellor as he accepted the book. "But you will have to accept one more responsibility. You will have to be the Chairman of the Board of Studies for Syriac."

"Gladly. I can use the income from that also for my Church."

He shared his happiness with his students that day. Some of them had already bought themselves a copy of the Grammar text in anticipation. The class was full. Students other than his own were also present. This was quite a common occurrence. He opened Adrian Fortescue's book and put it on the table and began teaching. Very rarely did he have to refer it. While he was engrossed in his subject one student raised a doubt. "Which is the Church that Jesus Christ established? The Jacobite Church or the Catholic Church?"

Father Panikar rose from his chair and paced about. It was not a

very difficult question to answer, but he did not know how his students would react. He remembered the time he had to face a similar question in the M.D. Seminary when the authority of the Patriarch was being discussed. And he had to suffer for it. Whatever the outcome he would not say anything against his conscience. He would say what he thought was right.

"I may be a member of the Jacobite Church but I cannot in all honesty say that it is the original Church. However I am still studying the subject and at this point of time I cannot affirm that the Catholic Church is the original one."

That question stayed in his mind. He would have to find a suitable answer to it. In the meantime other things intervened. He had to study much, meet people, and travel. Somewhere in these parts the Oxford Mission functioned. A group of them had visited Travancore and had spoken at a student's meeting. They had also given him their address. He now looked it up in his diary. Yes, three of their priests had visited his state. Shore, Holmes and Strong.

He had much to discuss with them, the most important of them being the education of girls in his state. They suggested that he visited the Women's College run by the Diocese in Calcutta. Accordingly he went and met the Principal, Sister Mary Victoria, an Englishwoman. No introduction was necessary as she recognized him. "I remember you, Father. I still remember the speech you gave a couple of years ago," she said smiling. She was referring to the meeting organized by Dr. Howells, he realized.

"Well what can I do for you?" she asked.

"I have brought a few priests and deacons here for higher studies. I should like to do the same for the girls in my home state. I would like them to come here and study and perhaps be introduced to a convent life. I would like your help in this matter."

"I can help you with the first part of your request. Your girls can study up to their Master's degree in this college. We do not, however, provide any training for prospective nuns. That kind of training is given only at our convent in Barisol. But if I am not mistaken you do not have provision for convent life in your Church."

"You are right. As a matter of fact we do not have provision for the monastic life for men, either. Monastic life for women is unheard of among my people. I am anxious to introduce this to my people."

"I know the best person to help you. Mother Edith. She is our Mother Superior. She is the first woman to have taken her Master's degree from Oxford University."

His faithful shadow, Deacon Yakub, made a note of the address. Mother Edith, Oxford Mission of Epiphany, Barisol, East Bengal. Father Panikar had no intentions of letting grass grow under his feet. He was soon on a train travelling the two hundred miles to Barisol.

What a change from Serampore! This was flat delta land created by the Ganges and the Brahmaputra. Barisol, he found, was a very small town indeed. Unlike Serampore it was a cool place. The Himalayas might be far away but the wind blowing off the eternal snows there kept the little town cool. Right through the hot summer the water level in the river was high with melted snow. There was not a rock or stone to be found. Fierce clumps of bamboo flourished in the marshy land, providing material for huts for the people there. The people were mainly gun toting Muslims. Apparently they had to be constantly on their guard against leopards, that came and went at will. Going about there was not easy as the mud was slippery. When the water rose the people went about in small canoes. At first glance one wondered why the nuns had built their convent here. But it was the right place for it for the people here were very poor and needed all the help they could get.

The nuns did everything they could do to improve the lives of the people. In fact they ran two colleges one for the boys and one for the girls just as good as the ones in Serampore and both colleges belonged to the Church of England.

Father Panikar soon found his way to the convent established by Mother Edith. It was built of bamboo and wood and looked rather fragile. A European nun was seated in the garden dressed in spotless white clothes that covered her from head to toe. Only her face and hands visible. She was a beautiful woman, obviously from a noble family, with a pleasant, serene countenance. There were some younger nuns seated by her listening avidly to what she was saying, and making notes. Her hands were occupied too, in some embroidery. It turned out that she was teaching as she sewed. She occasionally cast her light green glance over the notes the young nuns made. "It has to be Mother Edith," thought Father Panikar as he advanced to the group.

Mother rose from her seat to welcome the stranger and without asking for credentials led him to her drawing room where she sent

for something to drink. Father Panikar introduced himself and told her why he had come to see her.

“But I do not have permission to come to your state and start a convent. You see there are not enough Protestants there. But if you send me a few suitable young girls I undertake to give them the training necessary that will lead them to convent life,” she said.

He listened enrapt to the soft voice as she spoke. She would enable him to introduce the startling, hitherto unheard of, notion of the convent life for Syrian Christian women in Malankara.

“I shall bring a few girls here. Sister Mary Victoria has promised them admission in her college,” said Father Panikar.

“That’s good. It is good for girls training to be nuns to have access to higher education.”

Father Panikar felt a burst of happiness at the thought that he was going to realize his ambitions. Before he took leave he said, “I feel I have two mothers now. The one who gave birth to me is far away, but you are near, my spiritual mother.”

With a rare sweet smile Mother Edith asked, “And when do you hope to bring the girls here?”

“Almost immediately, I think. I have to go home anyway for a rather unfortunate reason. I have to appear in court in connection with a case that is going on. When I am through with that I shall return and I hope to bring the girls with me.”

As he stood up to take leave, his eye fell on the embroidery Mother Edith had been engaged in. She was embroidering a portrait of the Sacred Heart. It seemed that even the unfinished piece of embroidery had a life about it. “Who taught you to sew like that?” he asked wonderingly.

“My grandmother taught me to sew,” she answered with simple pride.

Just then another European nun joined them. Sister Helen had come to India about six years ago from England to look after her brother who had been wounded in battle and had stayed on. She had, quite by chance, met Mother Edith and right away she realized what her mission in life was. And so she had joined the nuns at Barisol and had been there ever since. It seemed to Father Panikar that suddenly a deep friendship had been forged among the three of them, a friendship that would last. His heart was singing as he returned to Serampore.

Chapter 15

Going back home was both sweet and bitter. The Syrian form of worship was Panikar Achen's very life breath and he had been starved of that for three long years. But it was now a battleground that he was returning to. He might not like it, but how could he keep away? Life in Serampore was everything an intellectual like him could desire, but his beloved Church called and he had to go. Accordingly he informed his people of his arrival.

He and his students were all returning after a span of three years. Their friends were waiting on the platform and as he alighted, John Elenjikal came running up and hugged him. K.V.Chacko and Advocate Philipose held his hands tightly. "How is the case going?" was his first question.

It was John Elenjikal who replied. "I have been sending you reports for the last three years. The only thing happening in our Church these days is the trial. It will take another three or four years to come to an end, I think."

"Each parish is involved in a court case to decide to whom their church belongs," added Philipose. "Every day one hears of fresh quarrels that end in fisticuffs."

The very eloquent Chacko added, "Nowadays if you want an audience with the bishops one has to go, not to their palaces, but to the verandahs of the courts. In fact if it were not for their long beards and the

Masanapsa on their heads one would not be able to distinguish them from the lawyers. People no longer want to listen to the Bishop's *Kalpana*⁵; they prefer to hear the court verdicts. I wonder where this will lead us to."

"Everyone is power crazy. No one objects to money being spent to help the Court case. The clergy now regard the sacraments and rites of the church as a source of making money. People have therefore lost interest in the sacraments." John Elenjikal sounded bitter.

5 *kalpana* : letters issued by the Catholicos or Bishops to the churches.

What had his beloved Church come to! With tears in his eyes he asked, "Hasn't the Managing Committee been able to find ways and means around this problem?"

"Our Managing Committee did meet with the Catholicos, but the decisions taken there had more to do with gaining possession of the various parishes and their wealth rather than questions of faith," John Elenjikkal said.

Panikar Achen was almost sobbing as he replied, "What a tragedy! We gave up our lives to serve the Lord, and now we seem to be going after worldly goods. We should have been caring for the aged or the unfortunates, but now we seem to be more interested in taking revenge on our enemies."

Every one was silent. What could anyone say? Then as if he were gathering himself Achen said, "We should try to go to the various parishes and visit the people there. Let's hear what they have to say. And we can also try to turn their minds to see the importance of our sacraments and rites, once again. In fact this has to be done."

"We are with you," his friends answered as if with one voice.

Turning to Deacon Yakub, Achen said, "See that you carry the books I have written. We'll distribute them free to those who would like to read them." He had brought with him about a hundred copies of his book on "Redemption From Sin" from Serampore.

He was most anxious to meet the Metropolitan, but it was a very sad Metropolitan that he met. It seemed to him that his beloved Thirumeni had aged more than the three years warranted. Thirumeni listened to his experiences in Serampore and was very happy to hear about the plans he had for the women of the community and gave him permission on the spot to take some intelligent girls to Serampore with him.

The visits to the various parishes were very revealing. The people, he found, were no longer interested in the Sacraments. He was astounded to find that people no longer bothered to go for the all important annual confession and Communion. Even if they did go to church they preferred discussing the court case in the churchyard rather than go inside the church and listen to the Mass. To add to their problems Protestants and members of the Mar Thoma Church were fishing in the troubled waters of the Jacobite church and steadily drawing away their members to their churches.

But when people heard that M.A. Achen was visiting their church they thronged to the church to hear their beloved priest. They had also much to complain about.

“No one cares about prayers or worship anymore, Achen,” they wailed. “Every week, without fail, Thirumeni’s *Kalpana* is read out in church, exhorting people to give as much as they can for the expenses of the all important case. I have even given the money I had set aside for my child’s treatment and I am still asked to give more. The Church has so far spent about a hundred thousand rupees in order to get back the *vattipanam* and it is still not enough. How much longer will this continue? There’s not much more to be squeezed out of us.”

M.A. Achen did his best to pacify them. “This is a testing time for us, as you know. At such times those who stand firm and do all they can to help are the blessed ones. Pray earnestly that every thing will be settled.”

The group that M.A. Achen had formed went to each parish and preached the word of God. And thus they came to Parumala Church where they found a large crowd. In the front rows were the people converted from the *pulaya* caste who had defied the bans of the forward classes. The lay preacher Geevarghese was there to guide them. Copies of his book on “Redemption” were distributed among the people.

M.A. Achen spoke of his Serampore experiences in his sermons. He spoke of the arrangements he had made to educate girls from the community and also introduced the concept of the convent life. When he ended his sermon and retired to his room, John Elenjikkal came to him and said, “I liked your idea

but I think it will be a strange one to our opponents. I am sure, however, that your ideas are never wrong. I think I shall send my daughter, Achamma, to Calcutta with you.”

It was heartwarming news. Achen had met her once before, a very courageous and yet humble girl. She would be an asset. Later a young seminarian from Parumala approached him. “I am Deacon Alexios of the Mattakkal family, and I should like to go to Serampore with you, Achen, when you return.”

M.A. Achen looked the young man over carefully. It was well known that he was able to judge people at a glance. And now he

liked what he saw. He saw before him an enthusiastic young man, well able to go out and get what he wanted. A few more questions were asked and the young man was inducted into his group.

There were also disturbing reports from the Managing Committee members and others which needed attention. "The Mar Thoma Church is taking advantage of our troubled times," was the sum of the complaint.

"How?" shot back the priest.

"They have been laughing at us publicly in their prestigious Maramon Convention."

"What did they say?"

"They claimed that our Church is a quarrelsome one and that if our people wanted peace they would have to join the Mar Thoma Church. They also decried many of our conventional practices like the prayers for the dead and the importance we give to the Blessed Virgin."

M.A. Achen was filled with anger. He could not bear the thought of anyone questioning the beliefs of his Church. Had it been the opinion voiced by a solitary member of the Mar Thoma Church it could have been ignored, but this was during a public sermon at the very crowded Maramon Convention and it could not be ignored.

One could not stop them from making such remarks. Nor could their beliefs be challenged. At the same time it was necessary that the Jacobite beliefs be made more public and the people given a chance to hear such teaching. Something would have to be done about it.

Even after he had returned to his seminary he worried over this problem. He paced the garden in his restlessness seeking a solution and someone or other kept pace with him offering suggestions which were rejected outright as being too ineffectual. His beloved friends like John Elenjikkal and K.V.Chacko and Advocate Philipose and the deacons stood on the verandah watching him pace impatiently. Ultimately it was he himself who came up with the solution.

"We should also have an annual convention where we can expound on our beliefs. It should be held at the same time every year and at the same venue."

"But where do we have a place suitable for such a purpose?" asked Advocate Philipose.

It was Achen himself who provided the answer. "It must be a

place that is easily accessible to all and it must have an area big enough to seat a large crowd. The church at Makamkunnu in Pathanamthitta has suitable grounds. I think we should consider that.”

The said church belonged to the Thumpamon Diocese and was easily accessible. It was built on a small hill with a gentle slope, a very airy breezy place. Thousands could be easily seated in the grounds.

“Now we have to think of a suitable time to conduct the convention,” said Achen. After a little thought he continued, “Spiritual revival is the reason why we conduct conventions. So I suggest we organize it in connection with a period of fasting. We shall organize it during the Three-day fast and it will be two weeks before the Maramon Convention.”

This practical idea was acceptable to everyone. K.V.Chacko had an objection, though. “There is not much time left if we are to organize it for the Three-day fast, and we have to start it this year itself.”

“I am going to entrust all the work in connection with this convention to you my friends. Go to Makamkunnu church tomorrow and meet Father Geevarghese of Thengumtharayil who is the vicar there. Get him to set in motion the proceedings. You have to send the necessary information to each and every church.”

“Since you have left the organization of the convention to us I suggest you be the main speaker,” said K.V.Chacko.

Father Panikar agreed. He also got his private secretary Deacon Yakub to make a note of it in his diary. He carried on his visits to each church.

The first day of the Makamkunnu Convention dawned. Every church had been informed. Canopies had been put up over a huge area for the people to sit under. Large crowds were expected as anyone who had heard M.A. Achen once would want to hear him again. And they came, climbing up and down the hills and wading through the River Achenkovil to get to Makamkunnu Church before dusk when the convention was to start. Long before the scheduled time the canopied areas were occupied and latecomers found themselves places to sit under the trees nearby. No one wanted to miss a word of M.A. Achen’s sermon.

It began with a song service. When the singing ended M.A. Achen slowly walked up on to the stage holding his Bible against his

breast with his left hand. Alongside him came the lay preacher who would assist him by repeating each sentence loudly. This was a common practice before the days of the microphone. He began slowly and softly. The Bible was his inspiration and he was conveying the wisdom therein to the large crowd, with the lay preacher shouting each sentence to reach the back rows. In between he had several examples to illuminate his ideas.

His ideas were profound but the expression was crystal clear. There was no one there who did not understand his sermon. Slowly his voice became louder and louder and reached every man in the audience. The preacher soon began to feel his own presence there was unwarranted. The sermon was clearly aimed at all those who had stopped going to church or receiving Holy Communion, because of the quarrel in the Church.

“Everyday we pray to the Lord asking for our daily bread. When we ask Him for that we should remember the bread He offered us—His own flesh. Why don’t we then sup at His table every day? We should receive Holy Communion as often as possible for that is the most important thing. It is a sacred remedy for all ills. One should not avoid it because of petty quarrels or differences of opinion in the Church. You must be washed in His blood and cleansed of all poisons.”

That speech went home to his audience. In the light of the lanterns hung all about, one could see repentance and remorse on the faces of the audience. People sat staring at him willing him not to end his sermon. But at the appointed time he ended his talk with one last anecdote.

“Let me end this talk with a short story. A certain Duchess used to spend all her time in church in front of the altar. Her people asked her what she did there whereupon she said she was doing whatever a hungry person would do if he were led to a table laden with food. “

Nobody wanted to go home without having another glimpse of M.A. Achen. So they hung on in spite of the difficult road ahead of them and the lateness of the hour.

He had begun his visits to the various churches immediately on his arrival from Serampore. He had yet to go and appear in court in Trivandrum in the ongoing court case. But before that he would have to go to Kottayam and discuss several things with Thirumeni. The

next day as he made his way into the Old Seminary Chacko Kilileth called out to him, "There are a couple of ladies to see you."

"Do you know who they are?"

"They have come from Olassa," answered Kilileth.

They were waiting for him in the visitor's room and as he entered they stood up and greeted him respectfully. They were Deacon Yakub's mother and sister.

"What? Have you come to take your son away?" he asked laughingly.

"Take him away? Never. How can I take away what has been given to God's service? Who am I to do that? If you had not come that day and insisted on my son going to Serampore with you he would not have had this luck." Then turning round she pulled her daughter forward, "This is my youngest child."

"I thought so," answered M.A. Achen. "She looks like Deacon Yakub. And what is your name, child?"

"Aleyamma," she answered smartly. Her voice was very sweet, however.

Her mother explained that she wanted to go to Serampore, too. Yakub Shemmashen used to write regularly about his experiences and when she had heard about the proposed creation of an order of nuns, she had expressed her firm desire to study and become a nun herself. She had only recently passed out of school.

"Certainly," answered M.A. Achen. "Deacon Yakub's sister will certainly be a good addition. Be ready to travel back with us."

As they took their leave, the priest turned to Deacon Yakub and said, "You haven't been home yet, have you? Why don't you escort your mother and sister home? Take a few days off."

Chapter 16

Panikar Achen returned to Serampore with a small crowd of young people. A group of four or five young men and Deacon Alexios of the Mattakkal family was not a surprise, but the presence of a few young girls was. The monastic life in general was new to Malankara. How much more when it was a question of young girls! Would it be a success? There were not many parents who were willing to submit their young nubile girls to the cloistered life so the few who came with him were girls who had voluntarily chosen it. Of special mention among them was a young lady well past the first flush of youth.

M.P Sosamma was just a year younger than Panikar Achen . She came from the well known Mookancheril family in Tripunithara. A very devout family. Sosamma's uncle was a Ramban, and her brother , Deacon M.P.Pathrose was a student in Serampore. From his letters she had heard of Father Panikar's plans for the women of Malankara, and had made up her mind to join them. She had been married at the tender age of eight and had been widowed not long after. Her family had pressurized her to marry again but she had only one answer, "My husband is Jesus Christ. I'll have no other. Please allow me to dedicate my life to Him."

Her family was not willing at all. Who would look after her in her old age? She was thirty-three and not getting younger, they argued. However, when she heard of Father Panikar's plans for the girls of his community, she felt that a way had finally been opened for her. She did not stop to think at all before joining his group leaving for Serampore.

As she alighted at Calcutta station she heard a joyful cry, "Kunjilachy." It could only be her younger brother, Pathrose who called her thus. The two greeted each other happily. The Deacon was happy that his beloved sister had finally found her vocation. The young girls were enchanted by this unusual form of address and began to address her so but when Father Panikar heard about it he admonished them gently and told the young girls to call her, "Ilayamma" instead, as one addresses one's mother's younger sister.

All the girls were from good families, and they showed it in

their behaviour. Achiamma was from the Ponvanibhom family in Kayamkulam. A girl with gentle eyes and a smile that was brimming over with love for all. She was ever ready to extend a helping hand to others. But K.V.Saramma was quite different. She looked strong and courageous. Her natural stance was majestic. She was aware of the fact that she was a member of the Koodathumuriyil Kandathil family in Vennikulam and never hesitated to voice her opinion if she felt she was in the right, which she generally was. She was lucky to have received an excellent training from her father, Varghese. But when she smiled, her imperious look seemed to melt away leaving her looking astonishingly innocent.

Then there was Elizabeth, daughter of Thomas of the Anniyil Polachirackal family, in Kattanam. It was Father Panikar's book, "Confession" that turned her thoughts to the spiritual and made her consider a monastic life. After that she would drag her father to all the venues where Father Panikar was scheduled to speak. Thus she came to the first convention held at Makamkunnu, and Father Panikar's speech there made her decide to join him when he went to Serampore.

The youngest in the group was Annamma, daughter of Philipose of Vadake Veettil, in Mavelikara, just eleven years old. She stood with the others, head bent, too shy to talk to anyone.

There was an unavoidable, overnight stay in Calcutta before they could leave for Barisol, and Panikar Achen had made all the necessary arrangements for that. It was a weary priest who returned to his quarters after seeing his proteges settle in for the night. There were many thoughts that troubled him so he entered the chapel to meditate.

He felt a great weight on his mind. He was much troubled by his Church, his foster mother, now in the throes of a civil suit. It seemed to him that there was no spiritual life left in the Church. It was a matter of pride with him that the Church had been established by the Apostle St. Thomas himself, and that it was Apostolic and Catholic in nature, but that did not prevent him from being aware of the not so pleasant side of the Church. He was determined to devote the rest of his life rejuvenating it.

He was aware that his Church was sadly lacking in evangelism. It was indeed a shameful matter that up to now they had not been

able to send even one missionary outside the borders of Travancore-Cochin to preach the Word of God. Had not the Apostle Paul said, "Woe is me if I do not preach the Gospel"? He had to rescue himself and his proteges from that fate. A sentence from the Bible kept repeating itself in his mind, "The harvest truly is plentiful, but the labourers are few."

It seemed to him that God was urging him on to take a great leap forward. He blanked out all thoughts. He felt as if his mind had become like soft clay ready to be moulded. He sat there immersed in his meditation. He had become almost numb except for one thought that shimmered through his mind, "It is more important for you to surrender yourself to God than serve Him."

Soon that sentence burned like a flame in his mind. A part of him seemed to be turning to ashes in that flame. He opened his Bible while still consumed by this deep spiritual experience. His eye fell on a verse from the Gospel of Mark, chapter nine, verse twenty-nine, "So He said to them, 'This kind can come out by nothing but prayer and fasting.'"

Prayer was his very life breath but it was not enough. He would have to become an ascetic. He would have to forget himself, give up everything in life, and forget the degrees he had obtained. That feeling of importance in him would have to be burned out of him. How often had he read, "The Imitation of Christ"? Had it not taught him over and over again that everything in life was an illusion? That wealth and fame were an abomination to a good Christian and that poverty and humiliation were to be welcomed?

And yet he had not put these principles into practice in his own life. Had it not filled him with pride when the people, from the Metropolitan downward, had declared him to be the most important priest in the Jacobite Church? He had always been proud of his post as Principal of M.D. Seminary, but now he was in charge of three departments in Serampore College, and therefore a much more important person. If he felt there was a speck on his snow-white cassock he would change at once into a freshly washed and ironed one. He was so proud of his newly acquired cycle and often raced past people just so he would be noticed. Was this the life he had lived so far? He recalled David's words in the Bible, about the rich vanishing like smoke. They are so easily forgotten. How he gloried in the fact that

he was the first priest from the Jacobite Church to get a post-graduate degree, and how enthusiastically he had welcomed the praises showered upon him in the press! Had he not carefully stored away the gifts and the letters of praise that he had received from the people?

What did all this matter? Would these temporal things make a difference to his soul? Would it bring him the peace of mind that he yearned for? Had he not realized yet that only those who gave up their lives for others, without expecting rewards, would find eternal peace? That only then could he hope to become the beloved of Jesus and earn the right to enter Heaven?

How often had he given up food and sleep just so he could earn his degrees and be known as an intellectual! What was it all for? Why had it taken him so long to accept the fact that everything else but the love of God was an illusion? That real knowledge would come only when he sacrificed all that was worldly and lived only for God? In remorse he beat his breast in agony and burst into tears. "Father," he cried out, "please do not forsake this sinner. Allow my tears to flow, O Lord, and give me the broken and contrite heart. All my years and all my work have been wasted."

Again and again he beat his breast in agony and the sound of it reverberated in the silent night. His heart was filled with the love of Jesus Christ. At that moment it mattered little to him whether he lived or died. The words of the hymn he sang at the beginning of Mass flashed through his mind and he realized its implication more clearly then, than ever before. What was needed was a group of people who would give up the world, parents, brothers and sisters, one's family and community and die for the love of Jesus Christ. Evangelism would be the main object in their lives. They would not be restricted to the home state alone, but would move out and go across the length and breadth of India spreading the Word. A community that would imitate Christ in every way. Not just preaching the Word of Christ but living His life.

The first rays of the early dawn stole into the sky. The sound of footsteps drew him out of his trance. His students were coming up to the chapel for morning service. He shook himself awake, then went into the vestry to prepare for Mass.

The deacons lit the lamps and waited for Mass to begin. Slowly the whole group of students spread out in the small chapel while the

group of girls stood in the back row. As he was the latest addition, Deacon Alexios would be handling the censor today. The curtain was drawn back revealing Panikar Achen in shining robes, swinging the smoking censor and chanting the opening lines of the hymn as he faced the congregation. It seemed to them that his face shone with a divine light, so bright, that a few actually shut their eyes. There was a hypnotic quality about his chanting and his sermon that day. Each one felt particularly drawn to him as if he were a magnet. Each word struck their hearts like flaming coals of fire.

When the Mass was over he turned to the congregation and asked the girls to get ready for their onward journey to Barisol. Soon they were on their way by train. As they had entered a small compartment they felt comfortable, free to talk to each other. Panikar Achen said, "I have written a short poem for you. I think it will help you in your chosen life. If you commit it to memory you will be able to remember the important days of the Church calendar in their order." He recited it for them and a few girls wrote it down with difficulty.

They reached Barisol before night fell. Everything was strange, the language, the dress, and even the landscape. When they heard about the leopards that haunted the area they felt a deep fear, which showed on their faces. Father Panikar noticed their expression and understood their need for a few comforting words.

"Trust in God and you can make a paradise of this place."

They felt their fears drain away as his words sank in. However, they did shiver as they felt the cold winds blowing. Elizabeth said she could not bear the cold. Promptly Sosamma took a shawl out of her bag and spread it round her shoulders.

Mother Edith came out to welcome the girls. As they looked at her smiling face it seemed to the girls that all the problems they had been enduring so far, had melted away in the sunshine of her smile.

"I am giving these girls to you. They are unpolished diamonds from the Syrian Christian community. I would like you to polish them and return them to me," said Father Panikar as he introduced them to her and Sister Helen and the other nuns who had come out to welcome the girls and take them indoors.

There was another matter that had to be considered. The girls were used to the Syrian form of worship and arrangements would

have to be made accordingly. Besides his Church did not permit its people to participate in any form of Protestant worship. When she heard of this problem she said, "I can arrange for them to have a chapel of their own, but you will have to arrange for a priest."

"I shall send you a priest from Serampore and maybe I shall try and say Mass here once a month," said Father Panikar. "And I have another request. I have just begun studying the principles of the monastic life and I have to read the book on it by St Basilios. Unfortunately the book is in Greek and I do not know that language. I wish you would translate it into English for me."

"Yes, that is a very good book on the monastic life and I have a copy of it with me. I shall have the translation ready for you when you next visit us. I shall start on it as soon as the work in connection with the building of the chapel is over."

Things were falling into shape. An inexpressible sense of satisfaction filled his mind as he returned to Serampore.

Chapter 17

It seemed to him that nothing mattered anymore except the fire that burned within him. That was eating into his very being.

Outwardly also there were changes. Nothing was deliberate. It just seemed to happen. His carefully planned life was changing. He no longer enjoyed going out for a stroll wearing a solar topi and snow-white cassock and twirling his walking stick. It just did not matter any more.

He took to wearing a saffron-coloured shawl around his shoulders. The saffron shawl was the mark of an ascetic in the Indian tradition and it had its uses, too. It offered protection from the scorching heat and drizzling rain, and if he were offered some food grains he could use it to wrap it up. If he was tired on his journey, he could spread it out under some shady tree or on a sandy shore and go to sleep. Oh yes, it was a very useful thing to have.

These changes astonished his students and his colleagues. No matter what the subject was he would soon veer round to theology. He soon began to forget he was a teacher and was more interested in learning. He read all the books he could find on spirituality and went searching for rare books. He also read everything he could find on the monastic life, most of them being from the Hindu tradition.

He went to the Sri Ramakrishna Ashram¹ and borrowed the Ramayanam and the Bhagavad Gita, the Puranas and the Vedas, and he read them all and absorbed their ideas. He also had endless discussions with the monks he met.

Slowly a vision of Christianity as it should be in India began to unfold itself in his mind. It would have to be thoroughly Indian in character. Foreign influences should not be allowed to spread. That, he felt was what was wrong with Christianity in India. That would have to change. And for that Christians would have to learn Sanskrit. They must know the Vedas and the Puranas. They must be thorough with the Indian tradition. Even their clothes should reflect the Indian tradition.

1 *Ashram* : hermitage

He lost count of the books he read in his search for answers. Then he began to seek *ashrams* where he could come to grips with the life of the ascetics.

There were two such Ashrams he could go to, both famous. One was Shantiniketan founded by Rabindranath Tagore, and the other was Sabarmati, founded by Mahatma Gandhi. The first mentioned was in Bengal itself, so he thought he would go there first.

He recalled the lines of poetry written by Tagore, and was impressed again by the idea it contained. How the poet had sought God everywhere without finding Him, but when he looked into his own soul he found Him there. The lines seemed to point the way to Shantiniketan. The first thing he noticed, when he reached the place, were the many trees. And he found the poet seated under the shade of a tree, looking just like his pictures.

Rabindranath Tagore was born into a rich family and had been sent to England for his education. The man who had returned claiming that he could not study there, started a revolution in education in his mother country. The University he started had astounded even the Western world. He was the only Indian who had won a Nobel prize so far. He was an artist, a musician, a dramatist and a short story writer.

A very impressive person, with a high-bridged nose, and long flowing hair and beard, and wearing a robe that hung down to his feet. He was deep in thought when Father Panikar approached him, but sprang up and welcomed him with outstretched arms.

"I was waiting for you," he said. "You are extremely punctual. You have arrived at the time you mentioned."

"How do you know that I am the person who wrote asking for an interview?" asked Father Panikar curiously.

"I may not have a university degree, but I can look at a person and decide what sort of a person he is. Besides, Christians generally do not come here. Certainly not someone belonging to the clergy."

"I want to live the monastic life and see how practical it is. I want to start a monastic order within the Indian context. And for that you must be my teacher."

"You can certainly study the monastic life here, but I doubt if I can teach you anything very new by way of ideas."

Father Panikar was surprised. He wondered why Tagore had

thought so. Seeing the surprised look, Tagore explained, "I once read an article of yours in English—a comparison of the Christian and Hindu faiths. It was in a magazine produced by the Serampore College. It was obvious that the writer knew the Indian tradition very well. It will be very easy for you to adjust here."

They had never met each other before, yet the poet-philosopher had read his works and remembered them very well. He was such a talented man and he exercised each talent. Yet amidst all his activities he had found time to read his article and had even remembered it. Father Panikar was very impressed.

Tagore himself took him on a guided tour of Shantiniketan. They walked through the spacious gardens and met the students who practised yoga under the poet-philosopher. His paintings hung on the walls and here and there verses from his poems were written on the walls in both English and Bengali. As they went around, Tagore said, "I'm afraid you will have to face a lot of opposition from your community as you say the monastic tradition is non-existent among the Syrian Christians."

"That is true. If they see a Christian priest dressed in saffron, sporting a long beard on his chin and long hair on his head and a necklace of wooden beads round his neck, they will have much to say."

"I know what it will be like for I have faced opposition, too. My father Devendranath Tagore was among those who pioneered the Brahma Samaj movement. It was meant to help people, but the Brahmin community of which my father was a member would not have it, and actually ostracized us."

"I think I know how to safeguard the movement against all opposition," said the priest.

"What are your plans?"

"My monastic orders will be independent of the Church authorities. I shall see to it they have full autonomy."

"Where do you plan to open your monastery?"

"I have heard of a place, a poverty stricken area in the interior of Punjab. I want to have a look at that place in the near future."

Fruit and milk were brought to them in earthen vessels which the two of them ate seated cross-legged on the floor. Then they repaired to Tagore's room where the priest was offered a book. "Father,

please accept this book as a small memento of your visit here. I feel I have made a friend for life, at this our first meeting itself."

Father Panikar took it in both hands. It was a copy of "Gitanjali" in its English translation. The first sentence that caught his eye as he opened it was, "Lord, I need only you." That made him remember the idea of total surrender to God.

As he took leave of Tagore he said, "I must go to Sabarmati without any delay. That is a different kind of monastic life."

"That's a good idea. My humble prayers will go with you."

"I am grateful, Gurudev," he said as he took his leave.

There were many letters awaiting his attention when he got back to Serampore. He picked up Mother Edith's letter first. It appeared that the work on the chapel was over and it only needed to be consecrated. She was asking him to go over for that. The time had certainly flown! What with his studies and his journeys, he had not been aware of the passing time. He also realized that the novices would need his attention. Poor girls! He had not been able to go over and celebrate Mass as he had hoped to and they were probably suffocating with the desire to attend the order of Mass they had known.. He would have to make some kind of permanent arrangement. See that a priest was made available to go over and celebrate Mass for them. He immediately told Deacon Mattakkal to go and call Thekkedath Skariah Achen.

When Skaria Achen came to him he said, "I have just had word from Mother Edith in Barisol that work on the chapel for our Syrian Christian girls has been completed. I would like you to take charge there. In fact, we must go over at once. Today if possible as tomorrow is the feast of St. Thomas. What better day to consecrate a chapel?"

Deacon Yakub entered the room with his account books ready for Panikar Achen's inspection and signature. "Not now," said Panikar Achen. "I do not have time for it now. I presume you are maintaining a proper account of the money. Just let me know if it is enough. When the expenses exceed the amount I give you, let me know. I'll make up the balance." As the deacon turned away, Achen called him back, "One more thing. You must go with us to Barisol today. Mother Edith requires help looking after our girls. I want you to stay with Skaria Achen in Barisol and help Mother Edith."

When the three of them reached the convent in Barisol the novices were filled with joy, but they waited for Mother Edith to give them permission to go and meet the priest. They came in with Sosamma leading the way.

Mother said, "I'll leave you to have a chat in private now and I'll come back in a little while." She was fully aware of their need to converse with their spiritual father.

Yakub Shemmashen was holding a big bag of oranges they had bought for the girls. Panikar Achen asked him to give it to the girls. It was Sosamma who accepted it but she set it aside. Time for that later.

Every girl there was anxious to see her spiritual father. Elizabeth stood on tiptoe to see him. Achen saw that and called her forward, "Come here, my child. How do you like the climate here?"

She did not say anything but only smiled and Sosamma answered for her, "Elizabeth often says she cannot bear the cold here."

"This is for you," said Father, extending a parcel to her. "I bought you a warm sweater."

Her eyes filled as she came forward and took the parcel.

He inquired of each one how they did. They were obviously very happy in the convent. They were all praise for Mother Edith who looked after each one of them. Every night she would spend a couple of minutes with each one of them and at the end of every week she would formally interview each one.

"Do you have any problems with the language?"

"We were a little upset at first, when we heard Mother speak in English to us. But she patiently repeated her words to us over and over again, until we understood. Now we understand her very well and are no longer upset."

Just then Mother came back. "Had a nice chat?" she asked. "If so I would like to talk to Father for a while. Go and study till then."

As the novices left, Father said, "They had much to say about your care for them. They are really lucky girls to have you initiate them into convent life."

Mother held out the fat notebook she was holding. "A Guide to the Religious" he read on the first page. It was a handwritten translation in English of St. Baselios's book in Greek. As he took it she said, "I have also devised a habit similar to our habit with a few alterations for the novices." And then proceeded to tell him about it. Before they were through discussing it, a lady entered the convent.

“I shall have to go now,” she said. “She is a member of the Brahma Samaj and she has come to teach us Bengali.”

“That’s delightful. When she has finished teaching you Bengali I shall teach you Malayalam,” laughed Father Panikar.

“Everything according to the Will of God,” smiled Mother Edith.

“Would you mind if I taught my girls Syriac while you are learning Bengali?” asked Father. “I should like to see what progress they have made.”

“Very well. I shall send them out to you here.”

Mother went away with the Brahma Samaj teacher and a little later the girls trooped in carrying notebooks and pens in their hands.

He took them through their lessons in Syriac and then through the liturgy. After setting them some exercise he went out and a short while later came in bearing something wrapped in his shawl. He had bought them roasted gram and as they all sat munching it no one would have guessed that this priest who sat chatting with the girls was the department head of three subjects in a University.

Chapter 18

“Our Church is not a very strong one. In such a context will monastic life be a success?” asked Vattasseril Mar Dionysius in one of his letters, rather doubtfully. All the same he was fully supportive of all Panikar Achen’s plans. He had been kept informed of every move that Achen had undertaken and indeed, his advice and his instructions had been sought at all times. Not that he had been able to advise much in any way.

Months passed and Achen decided it was time to start the monastic routine. He had already laid the foundation for it. He had visited Sabarmati Ashram and had seen how different it was from Shantiniketan.

Sabarmati, the ashram created for married people. Gandhiji and Kasturba were married but lived an ascetic life. They proved that even those who had not given up everything in life could still follow an ascetic life.

Father Panikar called his students together. “Once again I wish to remind you of certain things. I want you to remember that it is more important for you to surrender yourself to God than serve him. We must remember that we are carrying on the work of St. Paul for the sake of Jesus Christ.

We have to learn to love our neighbour as we love ourselves. And for that we have to purify our minds. It is not easy for those of us who go outside to live pure lives. So we have to learn to restrict our freedom and accept the monastic life.”

He stopped a moment and looked at them. They were anxious to hear and obey each of his commands. All the same he wished Deacon Yakub were here with him. Of course Deacon Alexios filled his vacancy admirably. He often came to him to discuss details of the monastic life.

“We shall start with a fairly light programme. We shall decide on a fixed time for prayers, followed by a spell of meditation. I wonder if you are clear in your minds about what meditation is. It is not enough to sit and think pleasant thoughts. You have to concentrate on God and try to merge with Him. Themes for daily meditation will

be given to you. But do not attempt to move on to the next topic until you have exhausted one thought. You should think deeply on your theme and absorb it into your very system. There may be times when your heart is sorely pained and you cannot even think. Or it may be that you cannot find words to pray. At such moments use whatever words that come into your mind without worrying over the literary style of it. Learn to pray in your own words.

Through meditation you will each have different experiences. Some may become extremely happy. But then you should not forget yourself and jump about. Some others may feel sad. But they should not despair. Each one should find his own posture for meditation. Until you hit upon the most suitable posture, either kneel down and meditate or sit cross-legged on the floor.”

Everyone sat silently listening to their beloved teacher. Listening to him was as good as meditation, they thought. “Before you go to bed at night each one of you should examine his own heart and if you have done anything that goes against the love of God or man, you should repent. After your evening prayers you should observe complete silence. And you will be allowed to break that silence only after your breakfast next morning.”

He allowed a few moments for them to think over what he had said. “That’s enough for now, I think. This will be our little Ashram and I will be your Abo.”

He was now tired of the worldly salutations. When he had obtained his postgraduate degree he had enjoyed being referred to as M.A. Achen. He was after all the first priest from the Church in Malankara to have obtained this degree. Now he was a professor of the prestigious Serampore University, but he did not want to be addressed as ‘Professor’. He would much rather be called Abo Geevarghese.

“What shall we name our Ashram, Abo?” asked Deacon Alexios of Mattakkal.

“There are many things to attend to before we find a name. We cannot have an Ashram in a big town like this. We will have to find a place somewhere in the countryside. Somewhere where there are not too many people. And when we have found such a place the Lord will tell us what to name it. Until then we shall watch and pray.”

“How will you carry on your work with the Ashram and your

professorships, Abo?" asked Deacon Mathew Paret.

"I cannot manage both. I shall have to resign my job."

They were stunned by the response.

Was there another in the Malankara Church who earned such a big amount as salary? He was using all that for the advancement of the Church. He had made it possible for about twenty-five people to go in for higher studies. The Metropolitan faction gloried in the fact that their beloved Panikar Achen was a Professor in Serampore College and earned as much as a white man did. How could he even think of giving up such a position?

Achen guessed what they were thinking about and explained. "I do not lay much store by such worldly posts. I would much prefer to lead the life of a monk. You would not have been so stunned if you had acquired the spirit of a true ascetic. An ascetic is dead to the world and lives only for God. Have you not yet realized that worldly positions and fame are obnoxious to a true ascetic? Poverty and suffering are like a crown to him. Surrendering to God is his only aim in life. He should always be in contact with God."

With great enthusiasm they started on the routine of monastic life. They started growing beards. After all, in both traditions, whether it was the Eastern Church or in the Indian tradition, growing a beard was mandatory. It was a sign of turning away from the world. Both teacher and students embarked on this path with full faith and trust in the Lord's love and mercy.

One day a telegram arrived quite unexpectedly for Father Panikar. Deacon Alexios saw him holding the telegram and looking lost in thought. "What is the matter?" he asked.

"I have received a telegram from Father Strong in Barisol asking me to go over at once. There are no details."

"Wonder if something has happened to one of our sisters——."

"In that case Mother Edith would have informed me. I had asked her to let the sisters observe a retreat for a week before accepting them as novices. I got her reply last week. There was no mention of anything wrong with the girls."

"Could something be wrong with Skaria Achen or Deacon Yacob?"

"Let's not worry unduly. Everything is in God's hands. Just keep praying earnestly that nothing goes wrong."

He at once sent a note with Deacon Pathrose to the University asking for leave. He then asked Father Lukose to get ready to accompany him to Barisol. Before leaving he instructed Deacon Alexios to maintain the discipline of the monastic life.

He spent the time on the train praying earnestly that nothing untoward had happened. However, Father Strong had rather upsetting news. "There is an epidemic of viral fever here and both Father Skariah and Deacon Yakub came down with it."

"How are they now?"

"They were seriously ill. Almost at death's door. But now they are on their way to recovery according to the doctor."

"Where are they now?"

"They were in the hospital until yesterday when they were removed to their room in their hostel."

"Let me go and meet them."

Father Strong accompanied Father Panikar and Father Lukose to see the patients. As they walked along briskly, Father Panikar asked, "How are the girls in the convent? I hope none of them contracted this."

"Oh! No. By the grace of God all of them are well. The epidemic flourished in the congested areas of the town, but the convent is away from this place. In fact quite secluded. Besides Sister Helen has been dosing them with anti-dotes."

They found the priest and the deacon lying on beds drawn close to each other. They were obviously very weak. However, sensing a presence they opened their eyes to find their teacher looking down at them. They struggled to rise but Father Panikar told them to stay where they were.

He prayed at the bedside of each of them and comforted them. Then he told them about the birth of the little abbey back in Serampore. In spite of their weakness they eagerly asked to be allowed to return there. It was very clear they were reluctant to part company with their guide. "I shall send for you as soon as you are well enough to travel," he assured them.

The girls were preparing to become novices. When they had gone on leave to their homes they had brought back with them some more girls. They also were eager to join the sisterhood. They were all in the chapel fasting and praying for those who were becoming

novices. Five days of the retreat had gone by with two more days to go. Mother Edith invited Father Panikar and Father Lukose to join them in their retreat.

After a short session of prayer he opened the Bible to teach them. Before beginning on the Bible he asked them what their ideas were on the monastic life in India. "Do you know what the aim of a monastic life is?" he inquired. "It is to gain salvation from the cycle of life and death in this life. There are only two ways to go about it. By doing and by giving up. The four stages of doing are that of the celibate, the householder, retirement and the last is that of the ascetic.

But the way of attaining salvation by giving up is different. One gives up, abandons the world completely and lives only for God. There are three stages in this also. First you have to decide what is destructible and what is indestructible. In the second stage you have to give up all that is destructible and then in the third stage, you have to by slow, but sure degrees, kill that idea of self you have. Only then will you attain salvation."

After that preface he read from the Bible, "If anyone desires to come after Me let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me."

He paused a moment and went on. "A true ascetic should love poverty. He must remember that wealth is a heavy load to bear. He must fear an increase in wealth. He should love the poor, the ignorant, and the humiliated."

For two days he carried on with his teaching and they all felt strengthened in their spirit. At the end of the retreat Abo said, "Now you are going to be admitted as novices. But before that would you like to go on a picnic?"

Eagerly the young girls answered, "Oh yes! Let's go on a picnic."

"You have been living here for three years, but have not seen much of this place. I could not take you around as I had no time."

"Where shall we go?" asked Saramma.

"We'll take a trip on the River Hooghly. Do invite Sister Helen to go with us and ask her where else we should go."

Gleefully the girls told Sister Helen about the picnic and invited her to go with them.

There were eleven Syrian Christian girls apart from Sister Helen who would lead the group. She packed a basket full of ripe papayas to take with them on the trip. But who would carry the basket? They were all girls apart from Kannankote Achen and Abo. Abo looked around. His eyes fell upon Saramma and he said, "Saramma shall carry the basket."

No one, least of all Saramma, a beautiful girl, well aware of her heritage, had expected it. The college going girl reading for B.A degree hesitated for a moment. Then she remembered the sermons she had listened to. There must be a reason why Abo had asked her, who came from a rich family, to carry the load.

His sermons suddenly became clear to her. He was probably measuring her she thought. Was she suitable material for the monastic life? Or maybe he wanted to make an example of her.

She bent down to lift the basket, but it was beyond her strength. She glanced up seeking help and it was Abo who came forward and helped her to lift it on to her head.

And so the proud Saramma walked smartly through the streets of Barisol carrying a load of papayas on her head.

It was a delta. They could see rice growing as far as the eye could reach. They walked in single file through the fields with Abo leading all eighteen of them. He had wrapped a heavy shawl to protect him from the cold and it must have looked like Jesus Christ leading his flock.

Soon they reached the river. There were any number of boats of all sizes available. They decided to try an open boat rowed by a single oarsman. They would then be able to look around and see the landscape. The scenery was beautiful. Green rice fields as far as the eye could reach, with white herons flying in and out searching for food. They climbed into the boat and the oarsman took up his long pole and they were soon on their way

Abo sat near the oarsman at the back chatting pleasantly with the girls on both light and serious topics. The girls sat around eating roasted gram listening to him and enjoying the conversation. Sister Helen stood camera in hand ready to take pictures of the beautiful countryside. On the wide expanse of the River Hooghly, their boat moved like a little toy boat on water.

Suddenly the silence was rent by a harsh sound. A big speed

boat raced past them narrowly missing them. The boat sped away leaving their own tiny craft tossing in its wake. The river water splashed into the boat wetting everyone. The girls screamed in terror as they tried to keep their balance. It was a flat bottomed boat and ill-equipped to withstand such a strong wake, so it tossed about throwing the passengers off their feet. The boatman kept screaming instructions which no one heard or understood. Finally he was able to steady the boat and bring peace to the passengers.

All this while Abo sat in his seat not stirring. Perhaps he was praying for his lips moved as if in prayer. Occasionally he would say, "Don't" to the screaming girls, but as no one heeded it he kept quiet. Sister Helen's voice however could be heard trying to comfort the girls.

Slowly the waves died down and the boat became steady. The girls now drenched in water huddled together, strangely quiet. Most of them seemed to have lost their will to stir or speak so frightened were they by their recent brush with death.

It was Sister Helen who broke the silence. "What were you thinking about, Father?" she asked.

"I thought of two things. My main concern was these girls. What would I tell their parents if anything had happened to any of them?" said Father slowly.

"And the second thought?"

"I remembered an incident from the Bible. I remembered Jesus and his disciples in a boat on the raging waters of the Sea of Galilee. How the boat was almost sinking but the Lord calmed the waters."

"The only difference being that this was on the River Hooghly," said Sister Helen quite calmly.

Abo noticed that the girls were still silent so he addressed them, "There is nothing to fear now, children. Look at it this way. This was to remind you that God is with us whenever we are in trouble." Then turning to the boatman he asked him to cast ashore.

The boatman waited to find a suitable spot before he rowed them close to the land. It was quite a strange place a little away from Barisol. After getting off the boat they inquired of the local people where the New Market was. They had to pass through a colony of tribals which pleased Abo very much. They came crowding round obviously asking questions. Sister Helen was the only one who

understood Bengali and she translated their questions to Abo and his answers to them. Suddenly she burst out laughing.

“What’s so amusing?” Abo asked.

“They want to know if my skin is white because I bathed in hot water,” she answered still chuckling. Everyone joined in the laughter.

From there they went to New Market. They had heard of it before as a place where everything was available cheap. “It is a crowded place,” he told them. “See that you keep together. No one should get lost.”

The girls walked with Sister Helen in the middle. A little later when they came to the stalls, Abo said, “What would you girls like to buy? Go ahead, and tell me.”

They stood there mutely not asking for anything. “I am sure there are some things you need. Do not hesitate to ask,” urged Sister Helen.

After a short consultation they came up with the answer. “Combs,” they said. Their hair had grown rough and prone to tangles with washing in the Bengal waters, and the combs they brought had lost most of their teeth.

Abo smiled at the answer and said jocularly, “I would have thought you would ask for scissors, not combs.”

They understood. They were going to become nuns and would soon be cutting off their long hair. They were going to give up all their worldly desires, weren’t they? For a moment they thought wistfully of their long beautiful hair that hung like dark clouds to their waist and then turned away.

But Abo went forward to the stall and asked for combs. He selected one from the combs laid out on a cloth and held it up. “Will this do?” he asked.

“Yes,” they nodded.

“Then each one of you take one,” he said.

Then Abo walked away to a book stall and looked at the books on display. Most of the religious books were quite familiar to him, so he selected two books on Indian art, paid for it and walked back to his flock. “Time to go back, children,” he said.

On their way back he turned to them and said, “Let us regard this trip as a farewell to worldly desires.”

Chapter 19

Night had fallen and the students were studying when they heard their beloved teacher going up the stairs. The unusually quick footsteps alerted them all and they got up. They heard him call aloud to Deacon Valakuzhy to go up with him. The serious note in the priest's voice made the deacon wonder uneasily if he had failed in his duties in anyway. He went over each instruction for the day and knew he was not at fault. He put away his books and climbed up after the priest.

Abo was standing in front of the altar lighted by just the one oil lamp that was never allowed to go out. As the deacon entered Abo said, "Shut the door, please."

Again the same stern voice. The deacon was even more alarmed. What could possibly have gone wrong?

When he turned around after shutting the door, he noticed that Abo was holding a cane in his hand. The deacon began to tremble. Why was he to be punished? He had not broken any of his vows nor had he failed in his studies.

Abo held out the cane to the deacon who took it without understanding. Abo then untied the laces of his cassock and drew it over his head. Then turning his bare back to the deacon he ordered him to beat him.

"Beat you?" the deacon said in a startled voice. It seemed to him that the light had gone out of the day. How could he hurt his beloved teacher who he regarded as a father? With pain in his voice he said, "I do not understand."

Abo turned round and looked at the deacon. A look that almost burned him. The deacon quite involuntarily lifted the cane and brought it down but not on the priest's back. He just could not do it. The cane whistled in the air, and the deacon burst out crying.

"Obey me," Abo thundered. "Otherwise I will have to look for other means."

That threat was enough. The other means might be even worse. The deacon brought the cane down on the naked shoulders in front of him.

The priest turned round furiously and snatched the cane from the deacon's hand and beat himself sharply with it. Then he handed the cane back to the deacon and said, "Beat me harder than that."

"Why should you who live such a pure life punish yourself so?" He had not meant to ask, but it burst out of him.

"First learn to obey. Beat me until I ask you to stop."

He had to obey. He went on beating until he heard the order to stop. The weals stood out sharply on the bare back. Some of them were bleeding. The tiny drops of blood looked like rubies in the candle-light. The tip of the cane had split open.

"That's enough. You can go now."

The deacon was sobbing as he walked out on legs that trembled and went down to his room. As he left the chapel he heard Abo say, "Flagellation is not only for one's own sins. One could do it for others, too."

The deacon did not question him more. His teacher was an unusual man. One could not even begin to understand him. One should only learn as much as possible from him and leave it at that.

Deacon Yakub and Father Skariah came back to Serampore. There were twenty-three of them now in the hostel. It was now time, thought Abo, to change some of their simple monastic practices and go on to a more demanding schedule. But first a monastery would have to be established. And for that some place would have to be found. He decided to seek help from others.

The monastery would have to be in a place that was calm and quiet. The village he had seen in Punjab still fascinated him, but it would not hurt to ask for another opinion. He would write at once to John Vakil. Not because the man was wealthy and would be prepared to accede to any demand, but because his opinion was really worthwhile. It was not money he needed now, but good advice. Accordingly he wrote to John Vakil and waited for the answer.

The academic year was drawing to a close and the students were busy cramming for their final examinations. Abo called them all into the chapel one day. He would have to introduce them into a more strict way of life, make them observe the fasts and penances that would be in keeping with the monastic life.

"Let us pray," he said and knelt down. The students followed suit. They prayed silently. He wanted them to have the same

experiences he had when in silent communion with God. It went on for a long time, much longer than his usual sessions. Many felt their knees becoming numb and wanted to get up. How could they do so when Abo was still on his knees? He had leaned forward and had bowed his head over a chair in front of him obviously in deep prayer.

It was an unusually long time to be so lost in prayer, thought the students. Normally it was he who gave the signal for stopping their meditation, but today there was no movement at all. Many began to feel uneasy. Something was definitely wrong. Deacon Yakubleaned forward and gently touched him on his shoulder, but there was no response. He shook him then and Abo slowly let go the chair and slid into his arms.

Everyone rushed forward. Deacon Paret splashed water on to his face and Deacon Pathrose fanned him vigorously with his prayer book. Deacon Alexios ran to fetch the college doctor. The others lifted him up and carried him down to his room and laid him on his bed. Abo slowly opened his eyes, but found he could not get up.

The doctor came and examined him and found nothing very wrong with him. "You are taxing yourself much too hard. You must have adequate rest, Father. Have some milk and fruit now, and rest. I'll come back later"

The deacons Yakub and Alexios were appointed to look after him round the clock. A week passed by thus. The doctor ordered another week of rest. But Abo found it hard to do so. There was a lot of work and he was accomplishing nothing by lying there in bed.

And then came John Vakil's letter which he read in bed. "Please do not establish your monastery outside. That will be a big loss to Malankara. I have another suggestion. I have some land, in Perunad, near Vadasserikara. It is hilly country covered with forests. If that is suitable I can give you a hundred acres for your monastery."

It seemed to him that a new life had been pumped into him. He sat up in bed to plan.

Soon all his plans for the monastery were ready. One thing remained. Find a suitable name for his institution. Surely God who helped him this far would do the rest for him? When Deacon Yakub entered his room he asked him to fetch the Biblical dictionary from his table. Abo shut his eyes and prayed while the deacon fetched the book and placed it on the table in front of him. Without opening his

eyes Abo slowly felt the book and opened it. With his forefinger he traced a line across the page and suddenly stopped. Then he opened his eyes and looked. His finger had come to rest on a word which Abo repeated softly twice over.

“Bethania! Bethania!”

He thought about Bethania in the Bible. A village that lay east of Jerusalem. It was once home to the people that Jesus loved most on this earth. Lazarus, Mary and Martha. Did it not mean the abode of peace? He prayed that his monastery too would become a haven of peace for the strife torn clergy of Malankara..

“A name has been found for our monastery. Now shouldn’t we find a name for our order?” asked his deacons.

“I decided on that long ago,” answered Abo. “We shall be known as the Order of The Imitation of Christ, and our nuns will be known as Sisters of Imitation of Christ.”

“That sounds like the name of the book you often read,” said one deacon.

“Yes. In every way we shall strive to imitate Our Lord Jesus Christ. Hence this name is most suitable for our order. We shall each one of us add the initials of it after our names. The monks will have OIC after their names and the nuns will have SIC after theirs.”

He thought of all the things he planned for his monastery and wondered if the place in Perunad were really suitable. When he went and actually saw it he was completely satisfied.

A little to the east of the place where two rivers, the Pamba and the Kakkat met, there were thick forests on hills that seemed to touch the skies above. A wonderful place to meditate. The outside world would not touch them there. Could there be a better place?

Abo looked around enjoying the peace and beauty of the surroundings. “This hill is known as Mundan Mala,” remarked one. “The hundred acres promised to you lies between those two hills.”

“What about that land between the two hills which is all covered with forests?” asked Abo.

“That belongs to the government. It is about three hundred acres.”

“If we could get that also we would have four hundred acres for our use.”

“True. But we would have to deposit a huge amount first, before applying.”

“Deacon Alexios who handles our finances says there is no money at all.”

“What will you do then?”

“I have never planned anything after making sure of the finances. First make the plans and then look around for the money. Something will turn up. God will show us the way.”

Mathai Panikar came that day as requested. After exchanging greetings, Abo said, “I asked you to come because I wanted to discuss something with you. I need some money immediately. Can you suggest some means?”

“Appa has just collected some two thousand rupees from his Chit Funds,” said Mathai thoughtfully. “You could use that money.”

“We could buy the government land with that money. But the land has to be cleared before we can use it. Where will we go for funds for that?” asked Abo.

“That is not a problem. Mortgage the land that John Vakil gives you and raise some money,” answered Mathai.

“That won’t do. You cannot mortgage land that has been gifted to you. It would not be right to do so.”

They walked about in the valley. There was no path to speak of. They made a path for themselves through the tall grasses and creepers. The unending chatter of the crickets filled the air, interspersed by the occasional howl of a fox. It was clear that no one lived there, yet they heard the faint sound of human voices. All of them stopped to listen. Could it be tribals?

“Swamiye — saranamayyappa!”

They were pilgrims on their way to Sabarimala. Dressed in black and bearing the “*irumudi*” on their heads, they were walking to the shrine of Ayyappan in the hills, and had camped in the valley of Mundan Mala. It was then that Abo noticed the Sivalingam and the oil lamp under it. The pilgrims were replenishing the oil in the lamp and were breaking coconuts as an offering to the god.

“We are on the route to Sabarimala,” said one. “All pilgrims stop here to replenish the oil in the lamp before proceeding on their way. It is a very old practice.”

“We must light an eternal flame on top of this hill,” said Abo smiling.

“Yes,” answered John. “And the light from this flame should

illuminate all Malankara.”

By this time they were joined by Oommen, a school teacher from Shooranad who was now teaching in a school somewhere in the vicinity. Abo had asked him to meet him here.

Abo turned to Mathai and Oommen and said, “Get some men to clear this land. We must find a suitable place on top of the hill and build a monastery there. We can use bamboo and wood from the forest. The hill is very steep so the road we build must wind its way up. But first we must have a resting place here, all built with easily available material at the bottom of the hill. Nothing fancy. Once that is built write to me in Serampore and then I can send Mother Edith to you here.”

A little later he said, “Send some of the good wood by raft to Thirumoolapuram. Send it to Father Mathews of Polachirakal there.”

Whenever he passed through Thirumoolapuram he would look at the huge building built by Varghese Mappillai of the Kandathil family with the money he had won in a lottery. So far the building had not been put to any good use and now it was being run over by creepers. Soon the forest would take over. If the land were cleared, and the building cleaned up it would make a good school. It had all the amenities, too. He could start a school for girls. That would benefit the community. He had already entrusted the task of buying the land and building to Polachirakal Achen, and it was almost certain that the deal would go through. If that went through they would have to build a convent near by to house the teaching nuns. There was plenty of wood available on Mundan Mala that could be used for this project. Mother Edith had given her word that she would come here to teach young girls and train the nuns. Everything should therefore be made ready for her.

After he had entrusted his plans to his staff, Abo made ready to go to Kottayam. “I must go and inform Thirumeni about my plans to build a monastery here in Perunad.”

On the way to Kottayam, Abo met the lawyer from the Elenjikkal family. “Achen, do you know that the court verdict has gone in our favour?” said the lawyer, all excited. “Everyone is celebrating the victory.”

“That was two weeks ago, wasn’t it? I got a telegram to that effect before I left Serampore. I also read about it in the newspaper.”

“Yes. A verdict after seven long years. Never in the history of the Church has a Metropolitan spent so much time in court.”

“Our Thirumeni has sacrificed much to win this case for us.”

“Immeasurably so. The cross-examination was often cruel. Once, in sheer exhaustion and exasperation, Thirumeni turned to the Judge and asked to be exempt from this kind of grilling.”

“The Malayala Manorama printed in detail all the court proceedings and printed verbatim Thirumeni’s testimony. That should be preserved for ever.”

“I have made bundles of the daily newspapers and have set them aside. In the four long months during which he gave his testimony, our Thirumeni cried once.”

“When was that?” asked Panikar Achen.

“When he spoke about your humiliation at the hands of the Muslim bodyguards employed by the Patriarch. Remember how they caught the reins of your horse forcing you to stop your carriage and attempted to tear your cassock and broke your walking stick? He cried when describing that incident and E. J. Philipose stood up and asked that it be recorded that the Metropolitan had wept. It was so recorded.”

“What did the opposing counsel ask about the installation of the Catholicate in India?”

“He asked if the Metropolitan had been aware of the invitation issued to Patriarch Abdhul Massih by Panikar Achen. He said he had not known about it.”

“What did he ask then?”

He was asked if the plans for the installation of the Catholicate were made with his knowledge. He said no to that, too. Our Thirumeni was not going to tell lies in court. The canon papers submitted by the Patriarch’s party in court were found to be false. They had apparently been made out by Mar Osthathios. Anyway the truth prevailed finally and we won our case.”

All the way up to Kottayam the subject under discussion was the court case. The rest he would hear from Thirumeni himself. So he went up to meet the Metropolitan.

Far from being happy, Mar Dionysius looked sad, but brightened up like the earth after a good shower when he saw Panikar Achen. He was after all his right hand, his only hope when faced with any

and all kinds of trouble.

“Your Grace has not suffered in vain. Only good has come out of it,” said the priest as he kissed his bishop’s hand.

“But we hear the opposition has plans to appeal to the High Court.”

“It is really sad that Your Grace, who is our spiritual father, will have to appear in court again.”

“What else can we do, son. We have to act to save our Church.”

“It seems to me that we have to first bring about a change of heart in our people,” mused Panikar Achen. “We do not have leaders for that.”

“Who said so? Tempestuous winds of change are beginning to blow,” smiled His Grace.

“I was anxious to discuss that with Your Grace. Every one feels that we should start the new movement here. I have obtained land for that purpose in Perunad on Mundan Mala. What I would like to do is make it an autonomous institution.”

“That’s a good idea. Only then will it grow. Otherwise it will be caught up in the Church quarrels and will become stunted.”

“Neither the Patriarch nor our Managing Committee should have any say in its management,” continued Panikar Achen. “We shall see to it that we create our own funds and manage our expenses with that.”

“What do you plan to do in your institution?”

“We intend to preach the Word of God to those who have not heard of it. Along with that we will have social service.”

“What about your job in Serampore?”

“I have decided to give it up.”

Mar Dionysius was silent for a moment. Panikar Achen was no longer an individual. He was an institution. He was the source of light to many people. There was no way he, the Metropolitan, could make him change his mind. All the same he could not help asking. “You are now getting an income that is comparable with what the East India Company is paying us as interest. If that source dries up how will you manage your expenses in the monastery?”

“The Lord that feeds the birds of the air will give me what ever I desire, Your Grace. Good people will extend a helping hand, I am sure.”

“You will have all the help I can give you. May God bless you and your plans.”

When A. Philipose and K.V. Chacko heard that Panikar Achen was back in Malankara they came post haste to meet him. “I am glad you two have come,” said Achen. “Let’s go to the Carmelite Monastery in Mannar. There are many things I wish to study there.”

They reached the monastery and pulled the bell rope. The priest, who was also the Procurator, came out. Father Panikar asked him many questions about their rules and regulations and about their daily work.

Suddenly the Procurator asked what name they had given their monastery.

“Bethania,” answered Father Panikar.

“Bethania,” said the Procurator smiling happily. “That’s very close to us.”

Abo laughed and turning to his companions who had not understood the allusion explained, “The Carmelite monks have taken their name from Mt Carmel which was very near the village called Bethania.”

“Now that’s a good name,” said the procurator approvingly. “But wouldn’t it be easier to call it Bethany?”

Abo looked inquiringly at his companions. “What do you say?” he asked.

“He’s right. It will be much easier to say it,” they said approvingly.

“Then Bethany it shall be,” pronounced Father Panikar.

Chapter 20

His doctor advised him to rest. But where was the time to do so. His responsibilities seemed to be growing day by day. He had started relief work in the slums of Calcutta among people who seemed to have lost all hopes of any kind. He would have to spend some time there at least on holidays. He could hope for no rest at night either, for he had much to write. Sometimes he wrote all night.

A major worry was finding the funds to start a monastery. He would have to find funds to sustain about twenty-five monks. He had acquired land for his project, but that was not enough. He would have to build churches and schools in the area around the monastery for a start. There were many other things to be done.

His father sent him money pretty regularly, but that was not enough. He would require about three or four times that amount. He was prepared to take a loan, but who would lend him money? Finally he spoke to Dr. Howells about it.

"I have a friend named Hamilton here who could be of help to you," said Howells thoughtfully. "He is not only rich, but he is willing to spend it on worthwhile projects. I am sure he will help you, Father."

His advice was beneficial. Father Panikar found that Hamilton was prepared to give the money to him. "Allow me to make a small contribution to your work. Would seven thousand rupees be enough?"

"Seven thousand!" exclaimed Father Panikar. "That is not a small sum. That is as much as I earn in a year!"

"I shall withdraw the amount from the bank today. And I do not expect any interest on it as you are using it for God's work."

"That won't do. When I take a loan I must pay interest on it."

"If you insist, I shall accept a small interest. Say two percent."

"That's not enough. You must accept the deeds of the land as surety."

"I do not need anything as surety. Your word is enough for me."

As soon as he got the money, he handed it over to Deacon Alexios to be used for their projects. And then added, "I think it is time you took your vows, Shemmashen. Go at once to the Old Seminary where

you will find the Bishop of Kandanad resting there. He will ordain you. After that you must go to Perunad and take the Seminary manager Chacko with you. He will be of help to you."

The pain in his leg was unbearable. It seemed to be eating its way up his leg. The pain was at its worst at night. He could not rest as he kept kicking his legs in pain. How many sleepless nights had he spent in agony!

"It is rheumatism," said his colleagues.

"Only ayurveda² can help you," said some.

It was become increasingly difficult to carry on in Serampore, but there was no help for it as he informed the authorities.

"I know you will achieve much more by leaving us, but it will be an irreplaceable loss to the University," said Dr. Howells.

"I want to go home and rest. Besides, I need treatment," explained the priest.

"Yes, I suppose you will have to go home for treatment, as the treatment here does not suit you," mused Dr. Howells. "I hope you will return to us after the treatment and rest."

"What can any one say of the morrow? However, I shall not forget anyone here."

Dr. Howells took a packet from his drawer and gave it to Father Panikar. "I know you need a lot of money for your monastery. This is six months salary."

"Thank you very much. Thank you for all the unstinting help and love you have given me. God will surely reward you."

"I have a request. Even if you cannot return to us as Professor, you must stay on as a member of the Senate in the University. We need your guidance and advice, you know."

Abo yielded to that request. He started packing all his books. Mother Edith had given him several valuable books and he packed them all. He would put them all into the library he visualized for his monastery.

Elizabeth and Saramma who were going back with Abo, came over from their convent in Barisol. There was quite a large of crowd of people at the Railway Station who had come to bid him goodbye. European missionaries, the college staff, and large numbers of stu-

2 *ayurveda* : traditional system of medicine as practised in India

dents came to bid him farewell. As the train moved many of his students walked alongside and stopped only when the train gathered speed. Abo stood in the doorway of his compartment waving to his friends until they were out of sight.

His discomfort owing to his illness increased on their journey. His companions, the two aspirants to the convent life could only grieve and pray for him. There was nothing else they could do. He had planned to go home to Mavelikara, but as they neared Kottayam he was almost desperately eager to seek medical aid somewhere, anywhere. So they alighted at Kottayam and he was taken straight to Varkey *Vaidyan* at Chembakasserry, an ayurveda physician who was known for his gift of healing. He was also an ardent member of the Church, and the proprietor of the *Kireeda Dharana Vaidysala*.

The treatment began. It was the traditional *pizhichil*, a special kind of massage with hot medicated oils usually prescribed for such cases, but it did not seem to work with Abo. He seemed to get weaker and even found it difficult to talk to the large numbers of people who came to see him. Then Philipose Vakil decided to take a hand. He got permission from the physician to move him into his own house nearby, so that he could be looked after.

"It should not be difficult for you to come over and administer the treatment," he suggested to the physician. "Everything you require will be made available there," he assured.

"Just make sure the patient talks as little as possible," said the physician. "Make sure the visitors are warned about his condition and ask them not to allow him to speak. See that he has only light food, something easily digested. He has to observe these restrictions for about ninety days."

Philipose Vakil did everything he could to make life comfortable for the priest. He could not enforce silence on him, however. Father Panikar had so much on his mind that he felt he would burst if he did not give utterance to his thoughts and plans. With great difficulty he spoke of what was uppermost in his mind.

"I have a lot of dreams I must make real. There is so much I have to do on Mundan Mala in Perunad."

"I would love to hear about them, but rest first and get well. Then we shall see what can be done there," said Philipose placating him.

“Yes,” sighed the priest. “Yes. I am sure God will give me a chance to realize my dreams. He will.”

“That’s what the whole Church desires, that you should realize your dreams.”

In spite of his great weakness, he had to talk about the ideas brimming in his mind. “Our Church has to have a group of people who will live like Jesus and whose mission will be spreading the Word of God. A few others will run a hospital where the poor can be given free treatment. Also a home for the old people who have no one to look after them.”

At another time he said, “An orphanage for abandoned children. Yes, we must have that. Then a place where people can retreat to and meditate. That should ideally be by the side of some river.” Even as he was speaking he fell asleep. He was so weak.

Deacon Alexios had been ordained in the meantime and following Abo’s instructions had gone straight to Mundan Mala with Chacko Kilileth. At first it seemed there was no sign of human life in the area. But that was not true as Father Alexios found. There were a few scattered houses and people in them, but there were no churches for them to worship in, or schools for their children to go to. Father Alexios realized he had been sent here to overcome these problems.

When they reached the foot of the mountain, they saw that a rest house had been built. A small rest house made of bamboo, and thatched with the wild grass that grew in abundance there. However, the house seemed deserted. Father Alexios peered through the half open door and found that whoever lived there had left his tools and his clothes there. As they looked up at the mountain they realized someone was trying to attract their attention by clapping his hands and calling out aloud.

“Aren’t they our people? There—up there on the mountain.” Chacko said pointing to the mountain.

Both of them started climbing. There was not even a footpath up the steep hill. The forest was so thick it did not allow any sunshine through. The bushes were entangled with several kinds of creepers making it almost impossible for them to make any progress. Huge boulders barred their way. And in the rocky areas there were deep caves.

Mathai Panikar came down lithe as a goat cutting away the entangled creepers in his path, thus creating a way for them to go up. He beat the long grasses in his path to make sure they were no deep hollows into which they could fall.

“We were waiting for your arrival and help. Why don’t you go to the rest house and change into more suitable clothing for this work? We have not made much headway in the work at all,” said Mathai.

Father Alexios and Chacko went back and changed, then went up the hill, carrying the necessary implements for their work. They found that the tribal folk had offered their help and were working alongside. When they sat down to rest, the tribals went into the forest searching for ripe edible fruit.

They knew where to find the fruit-laden trees. Like monkeys they would shin up the trees and pick the ripe fruit and share them with the whole party. They were about eight of them in all and as they went up the hill they saw signs of the presence of elephants in the area. The tribal folk pointed out the caves covered over by long grasses and asked them to take care. “You must be careful. There are tigers and leopards in these hills,” they cautioned.

Mathai Panikar, descendant of Mallitta Panikar who had single-handedly fought and killed many wild animals, was not at all fazed by the warning, but cheerfully went ahead with his well sharpened machete. He was not afraid of any wildlife.

It was almost flat at the top of the steep hill. Nothing but tall grasses and creepers flourished there. It looked as if the top had been cleared some time in the distant past, for there were huge forest trees that ringed the clearing.

“The sheaves were threshed and the grain winnowed here,” explained a member of the tribal group.

“What grain and fields are you talking about?” asked Chacko puzzled by this explanation.

The tribal pointed to one side of the clearing and said, “The grain was planted there. My companions and I have worked here before.”

The land was all covered with creepers of every kind. It was a beautiful place and the view from there was stunning. Everywhere there was a profusion of flowers and from somewhere nearby came the gurgling sound of water as it flowed down the hill.

Father Alexios looked around appreciatively and said, "Why don't we build the monastery here?"

"That is just what I was thinking of," said Chacko.

"Then why wait? Let's start at once."

It took them two days to clear the land and dig the required trenches which they filled with stones collected from the area and cemented it with mud. In no time at all a fairly large structure of bamboo and teak came up. They had no ropes to tie anything down so the tribals brought them the mature stems of parasite creepers which made excellent ropes. Once the overhead structure was up they looked around for material to thatch the roof. What better material could they ask for than the thick grass that grew on the hill opposite them. Off they went to mow down enough to thatch the whole roof. The tribals carried the grass back to their structure. Without the help the tribals gave so freely they would have found it next to impossible to go up and down those steep hills carrying such loads on their heads.

Once the roof was thatched they set about making the walls. They split and flattened Bamboo which was then tied together to form the walls. Square holes cut into the Bamboo frame made suitable windows to let in light and fresh air. Then they put up bamboo partitions to make rooms. The chapel was the first room they organized. A room big enough for about twenty people to stand and worship. Lastly they made the verandah, kitchen and bedrooms.

Every evening they climbed down the hill to the rest house there. They usually went straight to the river flowing by, and plunged in for a refreshing, leisurely bath. They felt new life flow into them as they came out.

But Father Alexios was obviously wasting away. The millipede bites on his legs had festered and his legs were now swollen. He could not bear the bitter cold and the sharp winds of the mountains, either. He never let any one know of his discomfort until he fainted one day as he worked at clearing the land around the monastery. His friends picked him up and found he was shivering and had a rising fever. It was typhoid.

Oommen the teacher, brought medicine which was given to him three or four times in a day, but even after four days the illness showed no abatement. Oommen at once set out for Kottayam and

went straight to Philipose Vakil's house. Abo was not there as he had gone to his home in Mavelikara for rest.

As soon as she heard of Abo's illness Sister Helen had rushed down from Barisol to look after Abo. Once she was in Kottayam, she saw there was much she could do. But to do that she would have to learn Malayalam, a language for which she found a strange affinity. She was adept at learning new languages as she proved when she learned Bengali in Barisol. Now she had set her heart on learning Malayalam. When Abo realized that, he asked Philipose to make suitable arrangements for her to stay on and learn the language. Philipose was only too happy to make room for her in his own house and then he found a teacher who taught her enough to get by, in no time at all.

Oommen wasted no time getting to Abo's house in Mavelikara where he found him undergoing treatment and resting. When he heard of his beloved student's illness he called for the *Vaidyan* who was treating him and made all arrangements to go to Perunad. His father Thoma Panikar gave him money and as much foodstuff as the boat would hold. Plenty of rice, whole bunches of bananas, dried tapioca. His mother thoughtfully sent a big tin of burnt husks to clean their teeth.

When the boat reached the jetty near the monastery, crowds swarmed to meet Abo. In no time at all the goods were taken out and removed to the rest house. There was no dearth of helping hands.

The new wide road that went past the rest house attracted Abo's attention. "That's new!" he exclaimed happily. "There was no road when I last came here. Who did all this?"

"On the day Oommachen and I started building the rest house a large number of workers came here with their tools saying they had been engaged to build a road to connect Perunad and the rubber estates in Laha. They needed a road to transport rubber to the cities, you see," answered Mathai Panikar.

"And that is God's grace," said Abo happily.

Later in the day Mathai sidled up to Abo with a request. "The land here is very fertile. If I could have some land here I would be able to farm it." His tone was conciliatory.

Abo's face darkened. "Not an inch of land will you get here. Whoever works for God and the Church will be rewarded by Him."

Father Alexios was very weak. Abo's *Vaidyan* examined him and prescribed certain medicines which he, with the help of the tribals, gathered from the hills above and prepared himself. Very slowly, Father Alexios began to get better and return to the land of the living. He had escaped death by mere inches.

"Now that the monastery has been completed, we can move into it," said Abo.

Abo himself had not recovered his health completely and was still under treatment. If he went climbing up and down the hills he would only get worse. So Oommen had a suggestion to make.

"You cannot go up the hill, Abo. We shall buy you a horse which you can ride."

Mathai and Oommen then set out to buy a horse. In two day's time they came back with a white horse for Abo to ride on.

Chapter 21

Abo lit the lamp on the altar of the new chapel. It burned bright as a symbol of the renewal of spirituality, in a spiritually poor community that was the Jacobite Church.

After his prayers, Abo turned to his flock and said, "I have been praying for some time now for a spiritual mediator for our Monastery, and today the name of the Apostle John flashed into my mind. Who better than he as our mediator? He was the one who loved Jesus the most. The one who leaned against the sacred shoulders at the Last Supper. As He was dying on the cross Jesus entrusted His Mother into John's care, and said, 'This is your son.' When He arose from the dead it was John who first ran to the grave. And when the Risen Christ appeared to his disciples by the Sea of Tiberias, it was John who first recognized Him. He was a celibate, too."

His students came to join his monastery all the way from Serampore. The small community was growing and it was time to share the work and allot tasks to the disciples. There was more work of a varied kind, too. A couple of orphans had been entrusted to their care and they would have to be looked after.

Everyone found the task of drawing water very tedious. The water had to be fetched from the river at the bottom of the hill. It was not easy carrying water up the steep hill, with not even a proper path to walk on. In fact it was extremely tiring. They often wished they could drop down and go to sleep after each trip, so exhausted were they. A solution would have to be found for this.

"In such a large forest area there is bound to be a spring or rivulet somewhere in the vicinity. We have not looked far enough for it," said Abo thoughtfully. "We must go and look for some source."

Some of them decided to penetrate the thick forest in search of water. Abo and Alexios Achen stayed back in the monastery, with Deacon Yakub to look after them. Chacko Kilileth was away attending to several errands.

Chacko had gone in search of a boat. There were no shops to buy even their daily necessities. It did not take much time to go through the food which was sent so lovingly by the Panikar family. They would have to go as far away as Kozhencherry, a good twenty miles

or so to replenish their stocks. A boat would be a good idea, they felt. So Chacko had been entrusted with the task of buying a boat and employing a boatman.

The disciples who went looking for water in the forest soon found a small stream flowing down the hill. It was not very large but the clear water of the spring flowed first into a fairly wide pool. Moreover, it was not too far away from the monastery, either.

The two young men who found it were Isaac and Jacob from Mavelikara. As they stood by the edge of the pool and looked into the clear water, they saw themselves reflected in the clear depths and were highly delighted.

“We can see our reflection here. It makes up for the lack of mirrors in the monastery.”

Abraham of Kalloopara heard this as he came up. Stroking his thick hair, he said, “Who needs mirrors up here? Shaven heads need no combs and no one needs to shave, either.”

Deacon Koshy of Shooranad who was right behind him said, “Well, Abo has taught us to find ourselves in other people, hasn’t he?”

They fashioned containers from the spathes of the areca palms found abundantly in the forest and carried the cool, sparkling water back to the monastery. Keeping the tanks full was no longer such a tedious chore. Very soon a path was beaten to the spring.

The euphoria did not last long. When summer set in, the spring slowly dried up cutting off their water supply. They did not despair however. “Seek and ye shall find, says the Gospel,” said Varghese of Pulikeezh.

And that was just what happened. When they moved deeper into the forest they came across a waterfall which promised an excellent supply. The only trouble was that it was too far into the forest to collect sufficient water for their everyday needs. They set their minds to solving that problem and soon found a solution. They collected bamboo and split them open and then laid them end to end from the waterfall to the monastery. They had the pleasure of seeing the water flow right into their tanks.

But the pleasure was short lived. In a few days the flow of water stopped. When they investigated they found that in some places dry leaves had fallen into the split bamboo and had caused it to choke. In

other places wild pigs had rooted in the area completely destroying all their pipes. It was enough to make them despair.

However, Abo was not easily beaten down. "There's nothing for it but to dig a well," he declared.

"Will we get water at this height?"

"God will provide," was the confident answer.

"Let me go and get a forked branch of the *Pala*¹ tree," said Deacon Yakub eagerly. He was aware of the gift of divination his master had. Abo had learned of it from a book a foreign missionary had presented him in Serampore, and he had found that he had the gift of divination. He had even proved this several times.

"No, I do not need one," said Abo. "We shall pray for it. And this time you will find the water, Shemmashen."

Abo's word was law to Deacon Yakub. He went into the chapel and knelt down and prayed. Then he went to Abo and asked for his blessing before proceeding to look for water. At a particular spot in the courtyard he bent down and made the sign of the cross in the mud, then proceeded to dig there. His colleagues joined him in digging. They had barely dug a pit fifteen feet deep when they struck water. To their delight they found that even in this blazing summer, little springs were opening up all around, and in no time the well was half full with clear sparkling water.

This prompted them to start a kitchen garden where they planted a variety of vegetables. They called the tribals to clear the jungle and prepare the ground for planting vegetables on a larger scale. They planted tubers and banana saplings and felt extremely happy with their efforts. The animals in the forest were happier. In the night they came and trampled all over the crops.

The sight of the dead and dying plants made those who had worked on the land whimper in grief. But Abo comforted them. "We have to do our work, not look for rewards. That will come from the Lord."

The wild pigs were a real menace. High palings were erected to prevent them from entering the vegetable garden and destroying their

1 Pala : *Alstonia Scholaris*, a tree found in tropical countries. It is said if a person with gift of divination holds a forked branch of this tree and goes looking for underground water, the branch will turn in his hands when he comes to such a place.

work. Chacko went a step further and bought a dog with a loud and ferocious bark to warn them when wild animals approached.

A year went by and Abo felt it was time they took the vows of a monk. There were two others who had prepared for this, Alexios Achen and Deacon Yakub. He had also decided on a suitable day, the day of the Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit had descended on the Apostles. He had ten habits made in white for them and which would be dyed in saffron, the colour used by Indian ascetics. "Dust thou art and to dust thou shall return," the colour proclaimed to the world.

The long awaited day arrived. Twenty third August, Nineteen hundred and twenty. As it was a Sunday the Mass would be held in the church in the valley, built next to the rest house for the convenience of the people living in the area.

Early that morning before the sun was up, all the residents of the monastery filed down the hill after their early morning prayers. Abo rode ahead of them on his white horse. The little children in the monastery followed holding bunches of beautiful wild flowers. Then came the disciples each carrying the various items necessary for Mass, the vestments, the chalice and paten in its box, the candles, the bells and the books.

As it was an important festival, the people around had gathered early. The vows would be taken only after the Mass and the special service on account of Pentecost. Abo would also spend a few minutes explaining the ideals of the monastic life.

"The monk can be compared to the sacrificial animal. The individual of his own volition comes to the monastery and there prepares himself. As his tears of contrition flow down he casts off all that is evil in him. When he comes to the church to take his vows he is in fact killing all his worldly desires. The vow of celibacy, poverty and obedience that he takes helps him sacrifice himself. Just as the sacrificial animal is skinned and cut into pieces and all that is bad thrown away, so our novitiate skins away everything unwanted, cuts himself up and leaves within himself only that which is pure. Then he surrenders himself to the Superior in the monastery, and the latter surrenders him to God, and receives him into the monastery in His Holy Name. Like Jesus Christ, he too sacrifices himself. That is what the monastic life is all about."

The three aspirants to the monastic life first surrendered them-

selves to God. They then donned the saffron robes, and tied a cord round their waists. Small black wooden crosses had been made and these were strung on black cords which they put around their necks. Then they wrapped a saffron shawl about their shoulders. All the other disciples also donned saffron robes. With Alexios Achen on his left and Deacon Yakub on his right, Abo faced the congregation and said, "From now onwards, Alexios Achen will be known as Abuna to you all, and Deacon Yakub will be your Teacher. Each one of you will add the initials O.I.C. after his name."

The two little orphans were filled with wonder. They asked each other, "What does Abuna mean?"

They knew that Abun meant father, but what did Abuna mean?

A deacon who stood by explained that Abuna signified next in command.

They looked like any Hindu monk. It was only the cross around their neck that proclaimed them Christians. Abo slipped his feet out of his footwear and said, "We have not come here to this forest for our happiness, but that we might sacrifice ourselves for the sins of society."

They went up the hill on bare feet braving all the stones and thorns in their path. When they reached the monastery thoroughly tired out, their rice gruel was ready for them. There was no regular cook. Each day one of the monks undertook the task of cooking for the rest of the group.

They had rice gruel for breakfast and dinner every day. It was only at lunch time that they had rice with the absolute minimum of accompaniments. They even gave up tea and coffee. They ate and drank out of earthen vessels, sitting on the floor which had been smeared over with cow dung and charcoal.

There were no tables or chairs in any of the rooms. The only furniture was the wooden cot fashioned out of wood cut from the forests. The mattress was a straw filled sack on which Abo rested when the pain in his legs became excruciating.

One monk served the hot gruel into the earthen dishes. Another sat under the big cross that dominated the room and read chapters out of the Holy Bible. The others listened to it and meditated on it as they supped. Each one washed his own dish and stacked it neatly in its place. After which they each went about their appointed duties.

Chapter 22

“Alms! Please give me some alms!”

Thoma Panikar came out of his house to see who the beggar was. A man in saffron robes was standing in the middle of his courtyard and asking for alms. The mendicant held out a wooden bowl. Thoma Panikar's old eyes focussed on the stranger and recognition dawned on him. He turned round and called out to his wife, “Annamma, come out and see who this is.”

Annamma came out as fast as her aged limbs would allow her. She stared at the mendicant who stood basking in the hot sun, though the mango tree in the garden offered pleasant shade. A couple of disciples accompanied him. All of them walked barefoot on the burning sand spread in the garden.

She couldn't believe her eyes. Her first born was standing there in their garden dressed in saffron robes and begging for food.

“Holy Mother of God,” exclaimed the startled woman, as she held her hands tightly against her chest. She ran to him and hugged him. Then wiping her tears she asked, “But why are you standing in the sun? Why didn't you come inside?”

Abo looked at his aged parents and said, “Today, this house is one among many that I go to. Please do not think I am being disobedient, but I have chosen the life of poverty. To be poorer than anyone else. Only then can I follow the Infant who was born in a stable. That is why I go from house to house begging for food.”

He did not enter the house, but continued to stand in the sun. His mother went in and came back with cool buttermilk for him and his disciples.

“What do you want me to give you?” asked his father.

“Anything you like,” answered Abo in a detached manner.

His father went inside and then they heard the clink of his keys. A short while later he came out carrying a small wooden box. From it he took out some treasured gifts which had been in the family for long. Fashioned in gold, they had been given as a reward a hundred years ago, to an ancestor of Thoma Panikar, a bodyguard of Maharaja Marthanda Varma. Thoma took these sparkling ornaments out

of the box and put them into his son's begging bowl. The whole village of Puthiakav was stunned.

Begging was not his sole aim. Abo was anxious to go about among the people and understand them. Feel their pulse as it were. Mix with the non-Christians. And evangelize.

He went about all over the country without a thought to his own self. He ate what he could get and slept where he could. His wanderings brought him back to a small colony of Harijans near Perunad.

When they saw him, the poor people crowded round him and narrated their woes. "We've all been ill, Master. Very ill. The couple who lived in that hut over there, died, leaving behind five young children. They are weeping and wailing as there is no one to look after them."

Abo walked over to the hut with his disciples. He found the five small children sleeping, huddled against each other for comfort. Hearing the sound of footsteps they woke up, and seeing the strange faces of people dressed in saffron they sprang up frightened and ran away in different directions. The others chased them and managed to catch three of them.

"Do not be frightened," said Abo soothingly. "You are not alone. We are there for you." He took them to Bethany with him.

Most of the monks in the monastery were on a fund collection drive. As it was harvest time some went to Kuttanad where they were given sacks of grain. This was brought back to Bethany by boat.

Alexios Achen had gone to the estates in Peerumed. When he came back he had a little boy with him. He gave the child to Abo and said, "I went to a house in Peerumed and asked if there was anything they could give me. The master of the house said, 'Yes' and went indoors. When he came out he was holding this baby. He had found this child apparently lost, and had taken it home. He gave the child to me."

"That's a good donation," said Abo. "I hope we get more such donations."

And that was exactly what happened. Next morning the residents of the monastery woke to the sound of a child crying outside. A handsome little boy. Of all the children who had come to them there was no one as fair and good looking as this one. Like a swan among crows. The others saw him and fought with each other for the privi-

lege of holding him. But it also led to a caste war.

Some people from the upper castes stormed into the monastery one day. One of them, a tall, powerful looking man said, pointing an accusing finger at Abo, who was just leaving for the slum colony with his disciples, "I hear that you are bringing up a child from the upper castes along with the low-born in your orphanage? Is that true?"

Abo stood calmly in the garden and said firmly, "There is no one here who is high-born or low-born. All are equal here."

The man trembled with rage as he heard this. "I have not come here to listen to your philosophy. You will not be allowed to bring up a child of the upper castes with children born of low-caste parents. Is that clear?"

Hearing the raised voices, all those who were within the monastery came out. Abo drew himself up to his full height. Casting his eyes around at each one of them he asked, "You people who decide a person's caste on the strength of his skin colour, are a despicable lot. Have you ever thought of the colour of the blood that flows under the white skin and the black skin? It is red. It is so all over the world. Every human being in the world has red blood in his veins. There is no difference at all."

But the aggressors did not go back. "No matter what you say, we will not allow you to bring them up together."

"Is that all you want?" asked Abo contemptuously. "I am agreeable to your demands. On one condition, however. One of you must take full responsibility for this child."

They had no answer to that one. It was clear that they were beginning to feel a little sheepish. Abo, however, was not going to let them off the hook so easily.

There was a twinkle in his eyes as he added suavely, "It is possible that it is the bounden duty of one of you, eh?"

They were clearly taken aback by the open accusation implicit in his words. Abo went on mercilessly, "I have been given to understand that the mother of this very fair child is a Harijan."

They had nothing more to say. They quickly dispersed leaving Abo and his people in peace.

All the children were dressed alike and all had close-cropped hair. Each one was given a duty that he had to perform. And each one was given the name of a disciple of Christ.

They would go out into the forest each morning carrying their little axes on their shoulders. By noon they would return carrying bundles of firewood on their heads. They would also bring with them lemons and gooseberries collected from the forest in little baskets. Sometimes they brought back with them garlands of the strongly scented *Elanji* flowers² which they would present to their father and teacher, Abo. He would admonish them gently. “You should reserve your adoration for the Cross.” They would immediately make their way upstairs to the chapel and garland the big Cross there and say their prayers.

They were all children, but man had created artificial barriers setting them apart. Children born to people somewhere near or far. Or perhaps their parents were dead. Anyway in Bethany they had found a mother’s love and a father’s protection. They were ready to do anything for Bethany.

One of their main jobs was looking after the cows. No one ate meat there, but milk, and milk products were essential. So there were about ten cows on their farm. Among them was a favourite of Abo’s, a red cow. But she was old, so Abo called her Mother Cow. Someone had presented him this cow for his sustenance when he had returned, weak and ill, from Serampore and the doctor had advised him to drink plenty of milk. Not a day went by that he did not inquire about the cow and its well-being. He never thought of selling the cow when it was too old to calve. It lay chewing the cud under the shade of a tree, and the orphan children played near her, or nestled against her. They would lie there singing songs and sometimes fell asleep leaning against her. If Abo found them there he would gently pick them up and carry them back to their beds in the monastery.

The number of orphan children grew and soon there was not enough room for them all in the monastery. A new building would have to be built and the children moved into that. Abo himself found the site for that. It would be built under the shadow of the monastery on the terrace below. The children were in the forefront making the necessary preparations —cutting the required posts from the forest or beating down the floor. No one had to go looking for the grass to thatch the roof. The children went out one morning to a hill nearby

2 *Elanji* : Mimusop’s *Elanji*

and by afternoon they had cut enough grass for their house. They cut and collected about a hundred and fifty bundles of grass and arranged it all under a tree. Abo worked alongside of them. When he got tired he went down alone to a hut made of forest vines and sat and meditated there. He loved to sit there alone, listening to the music of the wind rustling in the leaves.

A light burned within him, and it seemed to him that the light grew brighter and brighter. It seemed to him that the inner light was so strong it shone through him. A time came when it seemed he was experiencing something specially spiritual. Whatever doubts and confusion he had seemed to vanish and everything became clearer. It was a glorious moment.

Suddenly he heard an unusual sound. Many voices shouting and screaming. "Fire! The forest is on fire!"

He woke out of his trance and listened. The cries came from the hill to the north of them. He sprang up and turned to the sound. From afar off he could see the fire racing towards them. Racing like a demon with its mouth open wide to devour them all. The flames fanned by the wind from the hills seemed to be licking clean the dry grassy hillsides. Those who had gone to cut grass saw the blaze and tried to pick up the bundles of grass before running off to safety.

"Enough! That's enough! Come back quickly!" shouted Abo. Hearing his voice, the children raced towards him carrying what they could. But the fire was following them. And the animals of the wild broke cover and raced out into the open. The inmates watched helplessly as the fire ate its way through their vegetable garden. The green banana trees frizzled in the heat and one by one they fell, burned to ashes.

The one thought uppermost in Abo's mind was how to save his precious library. Nothing else mattered. He had arranged all his books neatly in the guest house. Hundreds of very precious books, and many of them given by Mother Edith of Barisol.

"Guard the library!" he shouted out. At once some of them set about clearing the dry leaves and grass near the library while some others drew water from the well and poured it all over the ground. Luckily the monastery was saved.

Once the construction of the orphanage was over, Abo and his men began going down to the slums again. He loved going there.

There were Christians, Hindus and Muslims there. All children of one God. But he would have to teach them that.

There was much to do. The poor there suffered from a variety of illnesses. He would have to teach them that the main reason for most of these diseases was the lack of hygiene and get them to remove the piles of garbage in the area. He would also have to provide medicines for them.

The slum people could not believe their eyes when they first saw these barefoot monks come into their lives. They were wonder struck by the ease with which they became part of their lives. Religion made no difference. They all came to him.

Abo was teaching the slum people one day when a Hindu gentleman came to see him. "Swami!" he said bowing low and greeting him. "Swami, I beg of you. Please visit my home."

"Why?" asked Abo mystified.

"My daughter is very ill. Please save her," the gentleman said in a voice choked with tears.

"Salvation and punishment are all in the hands of God. From time immemorial God has given to each one as much as he can bear. We cannot ask for any changes in His plans. Sometimes it is good for some people to die young. If they live long they might fall prey to the many blandishments of this world and lose their souls."

"Do not forsake me!" pleaded the gentleman. "I have only one child, no more. There is no door I have not knocked in vain." The man was openly weeping.

His tears touched Abo who said, "Alright. I shall come. Let's go."

As they walked towards the gentleman's house, Abo asked, "What is she suffering from?"

The man burst out crying and could not speak. It was his companion who answered. "She is suffering from madness."

"How long?"

In a tearful voice he answered, "Six or seven months now. No one else in the family has had such a problem."

The door to her room was unlocked on their arrival and Abo stood outside praying for the girl. The girl who was chained to her bed sprang up and rushed at her father screaming abuses. "Get out! I'll kill you. Get out!"

It was with difficulty that her father escaped her vicious clutch. With her hair streaming about her she was a pretty awesome sight.

Abo slowly entered her room. He looked at her. It was a fiery gaze and she wilted under that glare. She slowly turned away. That one look was enough to crush whatever evil power had overtaken her and bring the nobler side of her to the fore. "I shall go away! Do not hurt me! I shall go away!" she screamed.

Abo turned to her parents and said, "Release her from her chains."

They hesitated a little. She had been bound in chains for such a long time. It might be impossible to catch her again and she was capable of destroying many things. She would also cause physical harm to them. Or else she would wander about screaming.

But they obeyed Abo and released her. She came up to Abo and burst out crying. Abo soothed her and said, "Go and have a bath and change your clothes and eat something."

She did exactly that, surprising everyone. Her father fell at Abo's feet and sought his blessing. The slum people who had followed Abo said wonderingly, "How did you do it?"

"I did not do anything." Lifting the wooden cross he wore round his neck, Abo said, "It is the power within this cross that helped her."

The Hindu gentleman had prepared a feast for Abo. Abo looked at the laden table and said, "I am fasting today."

His host's face fell. But Abo blessed the food and said, "Go to the slums and invite the poorest there. Seat them at this table and let them dine on this."

His people went out and found a very poor pulaya boy. They brought him to the house and Abo tenderly seated him in the chair meant for him. The boy ate greedily. In a few minutes he had cleaned the plates. He then got up and ran away.

Abo followed him to his hut and found his parents. The couple were seated in front of their palm thatched hut. When they saw Abo standing close to them, they got up and went to the furthest spot in their yard and bowed low.

But Abo called to them. "Come here. Come close to me."

"What kind of madness is this?" The couple could not believe their ears and stood astounded.

"Come to me. Come on," urged Abo more sternly.

Trembling like leaves in the wind they crept closer and closer to Abo. The latter went up to them and put his arms around the man's thin shoulders. His only response was to cry. "Oh! No! If someone sees me here like this I will be killed," he wailed. "I'll go and stand over there."

Abo took no notice of this. "I want something to drink," he said.

At once the man started to shin up a coconut tree to cut down a tender coconut.

"I do not want a tender coconut," said Abo. "I should like some *kanji vellam*³ you have some."

The man climbed down from the coconut tree. He and his wife stood there obviously embarrassed. "There is no *kanji vellam*, my lord," they answered.

"Then give me some plain water, please." He walked into the hut and looked around and found the harijan's bowl and picked it up. The harijan came back from the stream with his earthen pot filled with water. Abo lunched on that water that day.

"Give these people something," he urged Deacon Yakub. The latter at once took out some money and gave it to the couple's son.

Abo and his disciples made their way wearily up the hill back to their monastery after a hard day's work in the slums. He had just spread out a mat to rest awhile when the orphan children came rushing in. "There's an old man in the rest house. He says he wants to see you, Abo,"

"Saddle the horse and go down and bring the old man up here," he ordered.

Abo stood on the verandah, looking downhill, and waited to see who the old man was. He took one look at the tired old man on horseback and recognized him. "David *Asaan*!" he exclaimed.

A wave of happiness spread over him as he looked at his old schoolmaster. He called all his people about him. They came and saw a strange sight. Their master was bowing low to an old shabbily dressed man. "Who is this old man?" they wondered and looked at each other, quite mystified.

"This is my old schoolmaster," they heard Abo say gleefully.

Abo hugged and kissed the old man and then led him into their

3 *kanji vellam*: rice gruel. Actually the water which is drained after the rice has been cooked.

dining room. The old schoolmaster said, “ I do not have another student who has achieved as much as you have. When my son Samuel comes home occasionally he gives me the latest news of you. I wanted to come and see you myself before I die. I am happy now. So I shall take my leave.”

David *Asaan* had brought some ripe mangoes from Abo’s house which his parents had sent. Abo took them and asked for them to be sliced. Then turning to the old man he said, “Do not go now. Please stay the night. You have your son Yohannan there to look after the home.”

They sat and shared the mangoes, and when they had finished, Abo took a mango seed and planted it in front of the monastery. Then he instructed his men to fill their boat with as much vegetable produce as the boat would hold. He had decided to send his old teacher by boat back to his house. Before leaving *Asaan* blessed his student, “You will rise to even greater heights. I am sure of that. You will become a great man.”

Chapter 23

Mother Edith and Sister Helen came to Thirumoolapuram from Barisol. They were not alone. There were two others, Miss Holmes and P.R. Brooksmith. Miss Holmes was Mother Edith's classmate and she had taught for thirty years in Oxford University in England. Then there were the eleven girls who hoped to join the convent as nuns. They had finished their studies, but continued under the protection of their teachers.

He had intended the first Bethany convent to be built at the foot of Mundan Mala, in Perunad, somewhere near the monastery. They were lucky, however, to be offered some land in Thirumoolapuram. When Kandathil Varghese Mappillai had been approached for some land for a girls school he had agreed very happily. His son Eapen Vakil had objected but Father Polachirakal had intervened and had secured the land for the convent. Wood for the convent was taken from the forests of Mundan Mala so they were able to complete the building in record time.

It was the very first step taken in the Jacobite Church for the upliftment of its women. Girls came there to study from all over the state, so arrangements were made to board them in the school. Along with the English women who taught in the school were the novitiates who had completed their training in Barisol. The students were soon addressing them as Kochamma.⁴

Abo visited the school whenever he got the time to do so. He tried to get know each child there. They were fascinated by his stories with good morals and crowded round him. When he found his ideals and hopes being carried out by the European nuns his joy knew no limits.

Sister Helen did not confine her work to the school. As she had mastered the Malayalam language she found it easy to go and work among the poor in Thirumoolapuram. She gave them medicines, and ran religious classes for them. She also started a primary school for

4 Kochamma: aunt.

only the lower castes. Abo named it "The Good Shepherd School."

It was soon apparent that expansion was required in Thirumoolapuram. Manager Chacko was sent for as he was the best person to handle such problems. "We have to buy some land near the school, Chacko. We should build a monastery there also."

Chacko loved to buy land. It was said of him that if he saw some prime land he would set about ways and means to buy it. It was rumoured that he had bought a lot of land for Bethany in Abo's name and had conducted all the necessary transactions himself. He now set out in search for more land for a monastery near the school.

Bethany was now the topic of the day. The people no longer seemed to care about the quarrel in the church or the court case. Every one talked of Bethany, and wanted to see it for themselves. Scores of people came from all walks of life to see the new institution in the Church. Even Hindus came, to experience the life there and perhaps learn from it. It was something that appealed to all peace loving people, and they showered their blessings on it.

For some time now Abo was a worried man. He had not yet been able to establish an Order of nuns and the girls he had had trained for the purpose had not yet taken their vows in spite of the years that had passed by. It had been much easier for his disciples to take their vows, but for women it was not so easy. For one thing Valia Thirumeni, Vattasseril Mar Dionysius, would have to co-operate. Without his presence the vows could not be administered to the novitiates. Somehow whenever the matter was raised Valia Thirumeni found one excuse after the other.

Abo decided he was not going to wait any longer. He would have to see Thirumeni and insist that he conduct the ceremony. While he was planning this he got an urgent message from him asking him to report at once. He understood the reason for the urgency. The *vattipanam* case was going on in the High Court and the verdict had come. The Judge, R. Veeraraghava Iyer had decided in favour of the Patriarch's group. He had upheld the excommunication order issued by Patriarch Abdhullah against his beloved teacher.

Thirumeni could not bear it. He had expected the High Court to uphold the decision of the Lower Court. It was like extending your face for a kiss and getting a slap in return. Thirumeni was ordered to hand over the charge of the church to his arch enemy.

The Patriarch's faction was jubilant and they lost no time pointing out that the Catholicos ordained by the excommunicated Patriarch Abdul Massiha was just a man in red and no Catholicos.

Reason enough for Abo to be sent for to Kottayam. Thirumeni must be heartbroken thought Abo as he went to Kottayam. As he bent over to kiss Thirumeni's hand he noticed how the trembling in his hands had increased. His old eyes were filled with fear.

"What shall we do now?" he asked Abo.

"The two court verdicts are different. But I feel that the ultimate victory will be ours."

"Right. We have to decide how we are going to achieve that. That is why we sent for you."

"But courts and lawsuits are not in keeping with God's ways, Your Grace," said Abo gently.

"I know that. But there is no other way."

"I am not going to be a party to any lawsuit, Your Grace. I am not really interested in the losses and gains in this conflict."

"Please do not try to wash your hands off this matter. You are my only hope."

"All I want is to be allowed to carry on with my work in the forests and hills of Perunad." There was a stubborn note in Abo's voice.

"I have long desired to come and sit in prayer in that place which to me seems as if it had been planned by God Himself. But where is the time for it?"

"I would count it a great piece of luck if Your Grace would come and stay there with me."

"I do not think it can happen in the near future. I am going to Mardin to see the Patriarch. With the High Court verdict against us we must go and meet the Patriarch and see what can be done to resolve the situation. Not that I feel like making such long journeys in my old age." Thirumeni's voice was tired.

Both Patriarch Abdullah and Patriarch Abdul Massiha had gone to their eternal rest. It was Patriarch Elias III who was the Supreme Head now. He would have to be persuaded to give him recognition. Which was why he, Valia Thirumeni, was prepared to undertake the very unpleasant journey by ship.

"It might be a good idea to take a couple of people with you,

Thirumeni," suggested Abo.

"Certainly. We shall take two priests and two laymen with us. There's another thing——"

Abo braced himself to hear what he was sure would be against his wishes.

"We do not know when we will return. But until such time as we are away we entrust all the Church matters into your care. "

Thirumeni took out the papers he had earlier made out, authorizing Abo to look after the affairs of the Church in his absence and signed it before handing it over. All the churches, the schools, the seminaries, and all other institutions in the Church had been given into his care. And all he, Abo, wanted was to be left alone in peace doing his work in Bethany. But how could he deny what his teacher had asked of him?

Abo received the papers and then said, "I also have something important to ask of Your Grace."

"Yes? And what favour is it that you want?" he asked affectionately.

"Your Grace has so far given permission only to the men to lead a monastic life. Please give me permission to start a convent for women."

"What!" exclaimed Thirumeni angrily. He made a cutting motion against his throat while shaking his head, implying he would rather cut his throat than give permission for a convent. Shaking a finger at the crestfallen priest, Thirumeni angrily said, "How many times have we told you that in a Church as weak as ours a convent for women is out of the question? It will only create a scandal. It would be much better to drown the women in the Arabian Sea."

Abo's eyes filled with tears. Without saying a word he left the room.

Many church leaders had collected in Kottayam on hearing the verdict go against them. Advocate Elenjikkal came up and said to Abo, "As the verdict has gone against us we may have to vacate the Old Seminary at once. Mar Coorilos and his people have already made arrangements to take over the management."

"I heard that the police have plans to take custody of the Old Seminary," said Mammen Mappillai.

In spite of his great disappointment, Abo answered gently, "There

is a lot of action you can legally take, Mr. John. And there is much you can do with your paper, Mr. Mammen. Yet, I do not feel happy about all this. I do not know if we will be able to see the end of this tussle for a long time.”

“Then what is the solution?” asked the leaders of the church in one voice.

“There is a solution. Not a temporary one. A permanent solution,” said Abo firmly.

“And what solution is that?” they asked eagerly.

In reply he asked another question. “Suppose we join the Catholic Church?” That question startled them and they were silent for a while.

They looked at each other hoping for inspiration. Advocate Philipose slowly spelled out another suggestion and then kept quiet.

“All eyes are upon you and on Bethany, Father. People trust you and have pinned their hopes on you. Let us move out of this Church with all its litigations and start another church. Everyone will join you, Father.”

Abo cast a burning glance at Advocate Philipose. “As it is we have pierced the Sacred Heart of Jesus many times over. Do you want to cut it into small pieces?”

Mammen Mappillai had been quiet, but now he spoke up. “There is nothing wrong with Panikar Achen’s suggestion. There’s just one thing though. If we, the influential people leave and join the Catholic Church, the ordinary folk will be like sheep without a shepherd and they will go astray. If we join the Catholic Church we should join it *en masse*.”

Abo was aware of Mammen Mappillai’s penchant for the Catholic Church. He had in fact written a laudatory article in the Malayala Manorama about fourteen years ago, and Abo could still recall some of the sentences from it.

“There is no power greater than the power of the Roman Catholic Church in any existing organization in the world today. The Pope’s position is just that. His is the only powerful voice in the religious world.”

With those words echoing in his mind, Abo said, “If people like us show the way and join the Catholic Church, others will follow suit.”

K.V.Chacko, however, raised a doubt. "Does anyone recall what our ancestors swore on the Leaning Cross in Mattancherry? That we would never, ever, have any truck with the Roman Bishop?"

Abo burst into speech. "If you think about it dispassionately, you will realize that swearing on the Leaning Cross was a foolish thing to do. It is true that the Portuguese, when they came here, were cruel in their suppression of the people of our Church. It is also a fact that our people invited the Patriarch Ahatulla to do something about the oppression. However, it was wrong to spread the canard that the Portuguese drowned him off the coast of Cochin. Without inquiring about the truth of it everyone sprang up and made this vow on the Leaning Cross, and that was definitely wrong."

"And we are suffering from the mistakes of that episode," Advocate Philipose said supporting Abo.

"We cannot do anything constructive because of the quarrels within the Church," said Abo sadly. "From the time I became Principal of the M.D. Seminary High School I have been planning to make it a college, but I have not been successful. If we did not have to contend with all these problems we could have achieved it long ago."

"How can you achieve that? Do not forget that M.D. Seminary stands on the land over which Father Mani Nidhiyirikal shed bitter tears," said K.V.Chacko.

Abo recalled the allusion. The Catholic Bishop of Varapuzha and Pulikkottil Valia Thirumeni had together bought the old Woodland's Estate with the intention of making a beginning towards a reconciliation of the churches. One night, however, Father Mani was driven out, and the land confiscated by the Jacobites.

"It was because of that incident that I was determined to keep Bethany absolutely independent of the Church," explained Abo. "No matter what happens, nothing will affect Bethany."

"Whenever we ask you about Bethany, you always claim that you are happy, that you are not in want, that you are fully satisfied; but is that the truth? I have a feeling that you have actually suffered a lot," said Advocate John sadly.

"You find the wherewithal for your people by begging for alms, I hear," said K.V.Chacko.

"One has to face problems," was the only comment that Abo made.

Advocate John came up to Abo and took his hands in his own and said, "I wouldn't like you to suffer in any way, Father. If you have to borrow for your survival, do so by all means. We shall repay such loans. What is more important is that Bethany goes on."

Chapter 24

He was always happy to obey the commands of his Thirumeni, but sitting in the driver's seat was not as appealing as his life and work in Mundan Mala. He longed to be back in the peace and silence of that retreat.

Yet he waited patiently. Many months passed by before he heard that his beloved teacher and his companions were setting out on their return journey from Mardin.

He marvelled at the way Mar Dionysius, in his old age, and with his feeble health, had undertaken such a long and tedious journey. It was all for the good of his Church. Could anyone ever thank him sufficiently for the work he had done?

The least he could do was to go up to Bombay to receive him. And so he went taking Mathews Paret Achen with him for company. He also instructed Deacon Joseph of Pulikkottil to make all arrangements for a formal reception in Malankara.

Thirumeni looked extremely exhausted when he disembarked from the ship. His beard looked untidy, blown in the wind, and his clothes were none too fresh. As Abo went forward and kissed his hands, Thirumeni said, "I don't think my journey has been completely in vain. It makes up for all the hardships I had to endure."

Abo was anxious to find out about the canons of the church. "What did the Patriarch have to say about the canons of the Church?" he asked. "Did he say that the canons that we presented in court were the acceptable ones or did he approve of the canons presented by the Opposition?"

"He heartily disapproved of the canons of the opposition, but on other matters he was rather vague," said Thirumeni.

"But you did say you had reason to be happy," argued Abo.

"That is a confidential matter." Thirumeni put his hand around Abo's shoulder and made him move away from the others. As they walked forward Thirumeni lowered his voice and said, "On my way to Mardin I happened to meet Patriarch Aprem Rahmani on the train from Baghdad."

"Oh! He is the one who left our Church and joined the Catholic

Church, isn't he?" Abo asked eagerly.

"Exactly. We told him about all our problems very plainly. His Grace then advised me not to have much to do with the Jacobite Patriarchs as they are anxious only about their positions and status, and that therefore we should have no reconciliation with them."

"What then did he advise?"

He insisted that the best thing we could do would be to join the Catholic Church. He has promised to provide all the help he can."

"What response did Your Grace make?"

"We gave him no firm assurance. We felt it was necessary to come here and consult you before committing ourselves. We would have been happy to discuss the matter in great detail, but we did not have much opportunity for that as we were not alone."

Abo's mind was in a turmoil. How could they bring about peace in the Church and what could they do to help the Jacobite Church?

Even as he returned to Bethany after handing over charge to Thirumeni, this thought was uppermost in his mind.

However, he decided that he would not worry unduly about it. After all, it was not his responsibility to take any decisions. Valia Thirumeni would do that and issue the necessary orders. He had only to carry out his orders.

When he felt the winds blowing off Mundan Mala, he experienced a sense of untold peace. All these problems seemed to melt away.

And then when he heard the treble of the young orphans in his care calling out to him he felt a heavenly peace wash over him. Here no one agitated for power, and no one thought about tomorrow. Everyone here had surrendered every problem to God and lived only to praise and thank God.

He had had to spend months in Kottayam on account of Thirumeni's journey to Mardin, which had tried him sorely. But he found on his return that several wonderful things had taken place in his absence.

For one, Deacon Yakub had been ordained a priest. The number of orphan children had increased. About a hundred acres of forest land had been cleared and ten thousand rubber saplings planted. They now had about fifty cows.

"Splendid," he exclaimed when he saw all this.

“Everything was done according to your instructions, Abo,” said Yakub Achen gently.

Next morning as he stood looking around the farm, he heard the monastery bell ring for breakfast. He washed his hands before entering the dining hall. Each one bowed low before the huge wooden cross in the hall and then sat cross-legged on the floor.

As he looked up to pray Abo saw a huge cobra coiled on the beam above him looking down at him. He had seen many poisonous snakes since his arrival in Bethany and in fact last night their dog Tiger had barked incessantly when a snake came by. But never before had he seen such a large one.

Abo kept quiet. He did not let anyone know until their simple meal was over. The monastic rules did not permit anyone to speak after dinner the night before, until breakfast was over next morning. He kept praying silently to his patron saint, St. George, the dragon slayer. Though it was a poisonous snake, Abo had no real desire to kill it for he felt sorry for it. After all, he reasoned, it had not come in with the intention of harming anyone. It must have somehow found its way indoors. He was quite willing to let it go away on its own.

When the meal was over, each one praised the Lord and filed out one by one, carrying his dishes to be washed and put away. Abo looked up again. The snake was unwinding its coil and slowly creeping up to the grass roof. That was dangerous, so Abo called out to his flock.

“A snake!” cried the children fearfully.

“Shall we kill it?” asked someone.

“What else can we do?” said Abo, unwillingly. Sadhu Koshy⁵ sprang out and returned with a long bamboo pole which had a forked end. The others including schoolmaster Oommen and Sadhu Isaac stood ready for action.

Sadhu Koshy lifted his forked pole and impaled the snake near the head. At once the snake spread its hood and began spitting. The people down could actually see its teeth as it opened its mouth. In furious agony the snake coiled round the pole. “Be careful! Do not release it. It is a particularly poisonous variety,” someone shouted.

“Not even if I die!” said Sadhu Koshy. “But don’t just stand there. Beat it with your sticks.”

The roof was low and the snake was within reach of their sticks.

They at once began raining blows on its head. In its agony and fury it sank its teeth into the bamboo pole. Suddenly the blows were too much and it weakened. Blood spurted from the wounds on its head and the hood was lowered. When he was sure it was dead, Sadhu Koshy relaxed his hold and the dead snake plopped on to the floor of the dining hall. It was then lifted on to a stick and carried out. Abo stood there and praised God that no harm had been done to his flock.

Just then the cook came up to him. "Abo, there is not enough rice for lunch," he said.

"Cook what you have and give that to the children. We grown-ups can eat tapioca."

"There is no tapioca, either."

"In that case we can go hungry. We can look upon it as a gift from God."

Until the bell rang for afternoon prayers, Abo sat in his room writing. There was much he had to write. His own experiences for one. Then there were several books all incomplete that he had started, but had not found time to complete. He now put away his work and went into the chapel. Each one filed in and knelt down behind him. This was the first time in the monastery that God had allowed them to go hungry.

Fasting was a way of life to them. But never before had they to fast because they had no food. One can deny food. That brought its own pleasure. But to allow his little orphans to go hungry was unthinkable. And to allow his followers who had given up their well-appointed homes to go hungry was unbearable. His eyes filled with tears that flowed down through his thick beard like a stream in the wilderness. As he knelt in front of the cross in the chapel he felt his heart would burst with the agony and he beat his breast. The sound reverberated in the chapel.

Yakub Achen who was right behind him did the same, and Abo hearing the sound turned round and asked him sternly, "Why did you beat your breast?"

Trembling with fear he answered, "Because I saw you do it."

"No! It was for you all that I beat my breast. You should not do it."

Just then they heard the sound of the door bell ring. Someone had come to the door. When they reached the verandah they saw an

old man carrying a big basket on his head. "Please help me put it down," said the old man. "The basket contains some *vellappam*."⁶

They helped the old man put his heavy basket down on the verandah. Abo gave the old man some fruit and water and said with a tender smile, "We have thus lost a golden opportunity to fast today."

There was enough in the basket for lunch and dinner. But what would they do the next day? Alexios Achen had gone to Kuttanad, known as the rice bowl of Travancore, to collect donations of paddy for their monastery and had not returned yet. He would not be returning soon for he had to have the rice parboiled and dried and milled there, before storing it in sacks to bring it by boat to Perunad. It would take some time to do all that. They had no idea when he would return.

The cook was the most agitated. He did not like the idea of going to Abo again, complaining about the lack of food. So he approached Yakub Achen, who was in charge of the kitchen that day. "What will we do tomorrow? There is no rice at all."

"Don't worry," said Yakub Achen soothing him. "God will show us a way. He will provide as He did yesterday."

Everyone in the monastery knew that they had no food stocks, so each one went to bed well prepared to go hungry the next day. The following day the man who normally rang the bells, did not do so. He went about his other work.

However, Yakub Achen rang the bell. They all looked at each other in surprise when they heard the bell ring. "There's nothing to eat. Then why ring the bell?" they asked each other.

Nevertheless they all filed in and sat down in their places with their dishes. Abo entered and standing in the middle of the room, he prayed, "Father all eyes are turned to You. We know that You will always send us the food we need at the right time. "

The cook entered the hall with steaming bowls of rice gruel, to the astonishment of everyone there. They all wanted to know who had sent it.

Yakub Achen had gone to the granary the night before and had taken out some paddy, had quietly parboiled it, dried it by roasting it and had then hand pounded it until the rice was ready for cooking.

6 Vellappam: Pancakes made of rice flour and coconut leavened with toddy or yeast.

He had then handed the rice to the cook and had gone to his room to sleep, without letting anyone know.

The monks and the others were filled with wonder and they quietly appreciated the love of God in their lives. Moments that were too sacred for words. God in His infinite mercy was making sure no one starved. They did not even know what words they could use to thank their loving Father.

Abo walked up to the big cross and took it down from the wall. He then held it as he ate his gruel on his knees. On seeing that his disciples did what they could. Yakub Achen took the crown of thorns from the wall and pressed it firmly down on his head before eating his meal.

“In God’s name give us something to eat,” they chanted as they knelt down to be served their meagre breakfast.

Chapter 25

He got the land for a monastery near Thirumoolapuram as he had hoped. Not very far, either. At the most it would be half a mile away towards the east from the convent. The monastery was built on the same lines as the one on Mundan Mala. A mud floor smeared with cow dung, mud walls, and palm thatched roof. In all there were about eight rooms.

Abo came with a few disciples and took up residence in the new building. As the school was close by he could keep an eye on its progress. Father Yakub's students Stepanos and Varghese of Pulikeezh and a few others were there with him.

Abo's room was at the far end. He sat by the window writing, his reference books spread around him. Suddenly his concentration was broken by the sight of a stranger looking into his room at the window.

It was a young boy, very dark, obviously a pulaya boy.⁷ Abo noticed the sad eyes and humble demeanor and his heart melted. "Why have you come here, Son?" he asked.

"I wanted to see you, Father."

"Why? What do you want?"

"I want to be baptized."

Abo stopped writing and putting down his pen looked him over carefully.

"And why do you want to be baptized?" he asked.

"To save my soul," he answered like one who had studied his catechism.

Abo went up to him and put an arm around his shoulders and drew him into the room. "Have you had anything to eat?" he asked gently. "If not, come with me," he said guiding him into the dining hall.

He poured out a glass of hot milk and gave it to the boy and then asked, "What is your name?"

7 Pulaya: a scheduled caste

“They call me Yacob.”

Abo sat down and said, “Now tell me all about yourself.”

“I am a pulaya boy, Father. My mother was a slave of the contractor in the estate. One day the contractor caught hold of me and said he was going to make a slave of me, too. My mother cried out aloud, but no one took any notice. Instead, the contractor threw a rupee at my mother and dragged me off. I managed to escape from him and fled. I reached Thumpamon that night and I found refuge. Mr. Mathai of Kalarikal gave me work in his house and taught me all about Jesus Christ. It was Mathai Appachen who said I should be baptized and took me to several Jacobite churches, but no one would baptize me. The people said that I was a pulaya boy and should not even be allowed in the churchyard. “

“Then what happened?” asked Abo.

“Then Mathai Appachen said he would take me to you, and he did take me to Mundan Mala, but you were not there. Alexios Achen gave me some books to study and asked me to return when I had done so. It was during the heavy floods of 1099⁸ and we actually swam through the floods to reach you, but you weren’t there. So I decided to come and meet you here.”

He was weeping as he came to the end of his story and Abo gently wiped his tears. “I shall baptize you, Son. Do you want to go home after your baptism?”

“That is for you to decide, Father.”

“In that case, I would like you to stay here from now on.”

There was a letter from Valia Thirumeni that day asking him to meet him in Parumala immediately. Abo was puzzled. He could not understand the urgency of it, but all the same he reached Parumala at the appointed hour, to learn that preparations for a Synod of Bishops was being arranged. All the bishops were coming as well as the lay leaders.

His Grace Geevarghese Mar Dionysius was growing old. Problems were mounting and His Grace was no longer in a position to deal with all of them. The once strong leader was growing frail and it was clear to everyone that someone else would have to take over the reins of the Church. Who else could take over, but P.T.Geevarghese

8 1099: of the Malayalam era i.e. 1924 A.D.

Achen!

Everyone was happy about it. Thirumeni himself took Abo's hands into his own and lovingly said, "We have never thanked you enough for bringing Patriarch Abdul Massiha here and creating a Catholicate in India. Now the time has come to thank you properly with a suitable gift."

Everyone one cheered, all except Abo who did not look pleased at all at this great honour. He recalled the great strain under which his beloved teacher laboured. Valia Thirumeni had not known peace of mind for years. Problems came up one after another like waves in the ocean. He found no time to seek even God. Abo had found peace only when he had given up all worldly work and ambitions.

"Forgive me, Your Grace. But please do not force me to accept this position," said Abo.

Thirumeni was taken aback and clearly upset. Panikar Achen might be his erstwhile student, but that did not mean he had to accede to all his demands. Besides he was not the kind of man to make any move unless he felt that God wanted it of him. His Grace understood that but he had to make an appeal.

"You are aware that our Church is in turmoil. We are asking this of you because you are the only one who can handle this situation. You must not refuse this."

"Your Grace is aware that I have given up all worldly positions and powers. Please allow me to carry on with my work, Your Grace."

"The decision to ordain you as Bishop is not ours alone. The Synod of Bishops has also decided that. Surely you are bound to accept their decision, Achen."

There was no escape he thought wildly. Everyone was determined to give him the reins. And then suddenly he calmed down. He remembered the girls who had trained under Mother Edith hoping to become nuns. Mar Dionysius was dead against the idea of giving him the necessary permission enabling them to take their vows. He was not even prepared to argue the point completely ignoring Abo's heartfelt desire to introduce the concept of convent life for the women of the Church. However, he, Abo, was now being offered the position of a Bishop on a platter. Once he was a Bishop he would not have to seek permission of anyone to start a convent or order of sisters. That

would be a big boost to Bethany.

Suppose he accepted the honour? Abo's face cleared. He faced the Synod and declared his willingness.

"I am willing to abide by your decision, but there's one thing—" said Panikar Achen.

Everyone leaned forward to hear Abo's condition. "You are all aware that I live in Bethany as an ascetic. If you insist that I become a bishop, I beg you to ordain me as Bishop of Bethany."

Everyone knew about Bethany. It was totally independent. Neither the Patriarch, nor the Catholicos, nor the Metropolitan had any say in the governance of Bethany. Bethany was growing like a banyan tree and the Church itself was finding shelter under its shade. Why not have a Bishop for Bethany alone?

Thirumeni agreed. "Very well. No other conditions I presume?"

"One more. When I take my vows as Bishop I will not formally condemn the Pope or other saints as is normally done. I refuse to do it."

Mar Dionysius was more inclined to hold fast to the customs of the Church. "There has been sufficient reason for the practice," he elaborated. "It is because one of our Bishops was publicly insulted in the Synod of Chalcedon."

"But is it not written in our prayer books that the Roman Pope is St. Peter's successor? Is it right then to condemn his successor?"

Thirumeni was not prepared to listen to any argument. He was not interested in the issue at all.

Whatever the truth may be, Abo was not prepared to argue with his guide and mentor. That did not mean he had changed his opinions or ideas.

"I will not curse or condemn anybody. I do not want to attain any position by cursing anyone."

Thirumeni did not object anymore as he had got what he wanted. He had succeeded in getting his student to accept the idea of becoming a bishop.

The synod accepted all his conditions. They also decided on a date to ordain him as Ramban. When everyone had left, Thirumeni quietly led Abo into his room and closed the door. It was clear that

something of great importance was to be discussed. Thirumeni unlocked his drawer and pulled out a letter which he gave to Abo. "Please read it," he said. "It is from Patriarch Rahmani."

Abo opened the letter and read. "We have rejected the Jacobite faith and have joined the Catholic Church under the Roman Pope as I believe there is only one true Church established by Christ. Therefore I would ask you to leave the Jacobite faith and join me in the Catholic Church along with your people."

Mar Dionysius said, "I would like you to write a reply to this immediately and give it to me. I shall have it posted. I am willing to follow Patriarch Rahmani into the Roman Catholic Church."

It was a totally unexpected reply. Obviously he had been much affected by the High Court's decision. The only way to save face was to join the Catholic Church *en bloc*. As far as he, Abo, was concerned it was an excellent decision, close to his own heart. Yet, he had a question to ask.

"May I write that?"

"Certainly," was the firm reply.

Abo sat with his eyes shut for a while, then began to write. Whenever he stopped to consider a phrase, Valia Thirumeni would say, "For the last two hundred and seventy-five years our people have been trying to be re-united with the Roman Catholic Church, but no one has succeeded so far."

He handed over the letter he had written and then set out for Tiruvalla. From there he walked to Thirumoolapuram. As he approached the M.G.M. High School, his pace slowed down. He had a sudden desire to visit the school.

A few members of his Church had got together to publish a new magazine, "The Veer Bharati". All the work on it was being done in the school. After reading the latest issue he felt he should meet the people responsible for it.

Not to praise them, but to reprimand them.

No doubt it was true that the Mar Thoma Church had in its magazine, "The Nava Bharati" laughed at the Metropolitan faction of the Jacobite Church. They had taken advantage of the High Court's recent verdict against the Metropolitan's people and had mocked them. But that did not mean that they of the Metropolitan's group, had to stoop to the same level and mock in return. He felt it was

necessary to meet the promoters and get them to stop such publications.

He found all the promoters there in the High School as he had hoped. They were astonished by his sudden arrival there.

“Haven’t you read Jesus Christ’s Sermon on the Mount?” he asked wading in to battle right away.

“Yes, we have.”

“And what did you learn from it? To forgive or to ask an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth?”

“To forgive.”

Holding up a copy of “The Veer Bharati” Abo asked, “Then why conduct a paper war? Can you not stop it?”

“Shouldn’t the Marthomites also have the same noble thoughts, Achen? In every issue of the Nav Bharati they hurt us cruelly in this manner. “

“Why don’t you consider it your good fortune?” countered Abo. “The Lord taught you to forgive your enemies seventy times seven; it means one must forgive endlessly. Wasn’t that what He taught?”

“Oh, but that, Father——that isn’t——,” they tried to find a suitable answer.

“I have only one thing to say,” Abo said firmly. “The Veer Bharati should be stopped immediately. Is that clear?”

“If they stop the Nav Bharati we shall stop the Veer Bharati,” they said mulishly.

“Oh! Is that so? We’ll see about that,” said Abo and ran up the stairs to the second floor.

Not knowing what he had in mind the others just stood there quite confused.

Abo drew two benches together and lay down on it. When the others came up to see what he was doing they found him lying at full length on the makeshift bed. “If you do not stop the Veer Bharati immediately I shall lie here and fast unto death. I will not eat or drink anything,” Abo told them firmly.

His listeners were stunned. The news of his protest spread through the land like wildfire. People came from far and near and surrounded the publishers of the paper. “If anything happens to our beloved Abo, neither the paper nor you will live to tell the tale,” they

warned.

Many hours passed by. Abo refused to budge from the stand he had taken and it ultimately forced the producers of the paper to approach him.

“You must stop your fast, Achen. We shall do what you want.”

He sat up happily in the midst of the large crowd that had gathered round him. As he went down the stairs, he said, “Don’t ever forget that a group of people were unfortunately forced to move away from us and form the Mar Thoma Church. It should never have been allowed to happen and we should always make every effort to bring them back. Our misfortune in losing them is greater than theirs in having gone away.”

As he was leaving he said, “You must learn to kiss those who spit in your faces.”

Chapter 26

He was ever ready to meet his Maker so there was actually no need for him to make any special retreats or confessions. His mind and body were ever in a state of readiness to die. All the same, before he took his vows as bishop he felt he ought to undertake a retreat, to see if somewhere in his sub-conscious mind he had some sinful or worldly thought that he must cast out.

He decided to observe a retreat for a week in the church. Not alone he thought. He asked Yacob to sit in retreat with him. He would be taking the vows of the Ramban immediately after, and then he would baptize Yacob. He called Yacob to him and said, "From tomorrow onwards we shall sit in the church at Thirumoolapuram for a week in fasting and prayer. We shall eat very light food during our retreat and unless it is absolutely urgent we shall not go out of the church. I have arranged for some food to be brought to us. I would like you to be ready for this retreat."

"I do not know what a retreat means, Father. You must teach me," said Yacob.

Abo took a small notebook from his table and gave it to the boy. "Sit down and think over your life that has gone by. Recall all the sinful acts you have committed and note them down in this notebook. Then confess it all to God and repent for having committed these sins. You shall be baptized as soon as our retreat is over."

Yacob was very happy when he heard about the baptism. Both of them went into the church and shut the door. Abo went into the chancel.

For the very first time in his life the little pulaya boy saw the inside of a church. He felt frightened as he looked around. He did not know where he was supposed to sit and meditate. Abo saw his confusion and showed him where he could sit. "You may sit here in the nave and meditate, and at night you can go to sleep here. Is that alright?"

Yacob tried hard to concentrate. His thoughts were like a monkey that sprang from one branch of a tree to another, not settling down anywhere. It was a struggle to force his thoughts into one channel

and keep it there. All day long he struggled with his conscience and by evening Yacob was thoroughly exhausted. He fell asleep where he sat.

Sometime in the night he sprang up. He had heard a banging sound and wondered what it could be. He wondered if it was thunder. He looked around and noticed that a candle was burning on the altar. Had Achen forgotten to extinguish it before sleeping? He got up and went up to the chancel and gently lifted one end of the curtain and was stunned by what he saw.

Panikar Achen was kneeling on the cold floor with both his hands raised over his head. He was totally absorbed in prayer. His dinner was untouched. Sometimes he would lower his hands and beat them against his breast. It was that sound which reverberated through the church and woke him up.

Achen also had a mission. What name would he take on when he became a bishop? He prayed ardently to the Blessed Virgin that he would select the right name. And he received the inspiration. He would be called after Apostle John. Yes, he would take on the name of the patron saint of Bethany. Then a faint idea slipped into his mind. He would take on the Greek version Ivanios. Sweet to the ears, but with a profound implication.

At the end of Abo's retreat, the Bishop of the Niranom diocese Mar Gregorios came to the church in Thirumoolapuram and ordained Abo as Ramban, and at the same time announced the date of his consecration as Bishop. It would take place on the first of May, Nineteen-hundred-and twenty-five.

Everyone waited eagerly for the great day. He would be consecrated in the ancient church at Niranom, one of the churches established by St. Thomas himself.

A spacious canopy was put up for the public who crowded into it in large numbers. Those who did not find place inside, thronged outside. The people of Mavelikara came in several boats and were seated in the front rows inside the church. The European nuns in Thirumoolapuram and the novices had arrived very early. The monks and other residents of Mundan Mala also came all the way. Abo's parents were seated in special seats in the front row itself.

All the clergy who would take part in the service, arrived. The second Catholicos of the Jacobite church, who had been so

consecrated just the day before, would officiate. The very first Catholicos had passed away a couple of years after his elevation to the post. Twelve long years had passed by before Mar Baselious was consecrated as the second Catholicos and the people were greatly relieved. Another one who would participate was Mar Gregorios who had conferred upon Abo the title of Ramban.

His Grace Joachim Mar Ivanios also came to everyone's surprise. He had been very ill and was not expected to live much longer. The people could not believe it. Many had gone to see him on what they had thought was his deathbed in Parumala, but now here he was, prepared to participate in the function. It was unbelievable but true. "This is God's will," they thought.

Wearing his saffron coloured *Masanapsa*¹ Abo Geevarghese Ramban knelt in front of the bishops who would conduct the service. No one had ever worn a saffron *Masanapsa* before to a consecration. But it did lend him a special glow, thought the congregation as they stared at him.

One thing bothered him. His beloved teacher and guide and foster father, His Grace Geevarghese Mar Dionysius had not come. It would not have mattered so much if he had been away in a distant land. But no, he was here in Parumala, a mere three miles away. He knew why Thirumeni had absented himself, but it did not mitigate the disappointment. Thirumeni had admitted in court that he was subservient to the Patriarch at Antioch. This consecration was being conducted without the sanction of the Patriarch, and now that the High Court's verdict had gone against him it was better he kept away from such a public function.

The service was hours long. At the end Bishop Joachim Mar Ivanios placed his trembling hands on Abo's head and blessed him. A wooden crosier was placed in his hand and then standing in front of the altar, he lifted his cross and blessed the new bishop and the congregation three times, bringing to a close the long service of consecration.

The consecration was followed by a public reception for the new bishop. His Grace Geevarghese Mar Ivanios, the new Bishop of

1 *Masanapsa*: a conical shaped skull cap coming down to the nape worn by Rambans and bishops at all times.

Bethany, rose to speak. He was only forty-three years old but it seemed he had done the work of a lifetime already. He made a very impressive sight with his shining eyes and his thick dark beard faintly laced with silver. He began to speak in his deep voice, rather like the roar of a lion in its lair. His words flowed forth like a waterfall. As the newly consecrated Catholicos was present, the new Bishop of Bethany began by speaking about the role of the Catholicate. "Now that the Catholicate has been established we must try to get closer to the Church of Antioch," he said.

The speech was a call for the reunification of the Church. As the head of the Church and the shepherd of his flock he had a very great responsibility and he hoped the new Catholicos would regard reunification as his primary duty.

Then he went on to speak of Bethany. "If the Christian Church is compared to a human body, then the monastic life is its very heart. The diocese of the Bishop of Bethany might be small, but its ideals were big. Our chief aim in life is to love our God and to serve the people around us. Praise be to the Lord for calling the head of the monastery to the Episcopal state, making him Bishop of Bethany."

Though the speech was based on the history of the Church and its canons, the people sat engrossed. Towards the end his tone became more authoritative. He said, "It cannot be denied that the majority of the Syrian Christians are a part of the Catholic Church which is world wide. They are flesh of our flesh and bone of our bone. It is high time there was reunification between these two groups. You know that Jesus himself prayed so to His Father, that everyone who follows Him be united just as the Father is united with the Son. If this prayer is to see fulfillment we should in all faith and humility make an effort to reunite. The Christians cannot ask for a greater piece of good fortune than this."

The audience was stunned and turned to each other in disbelief. "What are we listening to?" they seemed to be muttering to each other. So far they had only experienced communal rifts. It was the first time they were hearing such ideas. And that too, from a Jacobite bishop!

Nobody objected, however. Nobody had the guts to object. Not even the most orthodox among them, for they knew that if they raised an objection the Bishop would mow them all down mercilessly

and they wouldn't have a leg to stand on. So they kept quiet and went on listening.

He ended his speech by talking about himself. In the entire history of the church never had a bishop been consecrated wearing saffron robes. Perhaps, he felt that he owed the audience an explanation.

“There are two kinds of ascetics. There are the princely kind who live ascetic lives, but who live royal lives all the same, and there are others who give up everything and take to the forest. I am of the latter kind. I have given up everything in life and I live in a monastery in the forests. That is why I wear saffron and a wooden cross around my neck and carry a wooden crosier. “

The reception drew to a close and the large audience dispersed. Many however gathered round him to greet him personally. The people of Mavelikara could not contain their joy at this honour to their village and as they kissed his hands they spoke about the reception they were planning to give him in Mavelikara. They were anxious to have a date fixed before they left.

“You know I do not care for such receptions,” replied the new Bishop. “I will have to take precious time off from my work in Bethany. I have a lot more to do to develop it. Why don't you give up the idea of a reception and use the money instead to help the poor, or alternately give it to Bethany. I can use it. That would definitely be better.”

The vicar of the church in Puthiakav, his village, pleaded with him humbly. “Mavelikara has given birth to many kings and queens in this land, Your Grace, but this is the first time that it has seen the birth of a bishop. Therefore Your Grace, you must come to Mavelikara.”

He had to yield to that persuasion. He stood there chatting with his relatives and old friends and then, before taking his leave of them he lifted the cross he wore round his neck and blessed them. He then walked back to the church.

He went straight to see the ailing Bishop Joachim Mar Ivanios, who was resting in his room. His heart was full of gratitude. In spite of being at death's door, the Lord had given the old Bishop the energy to come and grace this function. Just so that he could bless him.

His Grace received the new bishop warmly. "That was a stirring speech," he commented. "No one expected such an open appeal for reunification. But it was good that you asked for it."

"If I feel that I am in the right I have no objection to speaking openly about it, Your Grace."

"And that is just what we need. We are glad that you at least have the courage to speak out. I hope this speech will be the first step taken towards reunification with the Roman Catholic Church."

"Please pray that it may be so, Your Grace."

"It is clear from the canons of our Church that we hold St. Peter in the highest respect. We are aware of the greatness of the Roman Catholic Church and I do not understand why we do not acknowledge the Pope as our Head. The day I realized it, I decided to make a move towards reunification and I made my plans accordingly."

Joachim Mar Ivanios stopped speaking and looked very sad.

"What then prevented Your Grace from initiating this?" asked Abo.

The frail bishop sat up in bed to speak. "I realized last year that the Roman Catholic Church was the One True Church. At once I discussed the matter with Archbishop Augustine Kandathil of the Ernakulam archdiocese and even decided on a day to join the Catholic Church. I also arranged for a car to go to Ernakulam. My nephew, who was dead against reunification, cheated me, however. He suggested it would be more comfortable for me to travel by boat and put me at night on what I thought was a boat going to Ernakulam. Out of sheer weariness I fell asleep and discovered the treachery when I woke up in the morning at three o'clock to pray."

"What was the treachery?"

"I had been put on a boat that went, not to Ernakulam, but to Parumala instead. I was completely shattered that day. After that I never went anywhere but stayed on in Parumala. This is the first time I am going out anywhere after that."

"So I had the good fortune to be blessed by Your Grace."

Just then the novitiates entered. Their happiness showed on their faces. The new Bishop lovingly spoke to them accepting their congratulations and then said, "My children it is for you that I bear this cross. For you alone."

Chapter 27

It should have been raining heavily at this time of the year. But months had passed by without even a drizzle. The trees seemed to be stretching out their bare arms to the heavens pleading for rain. The whole world seemed to be burning. The earth seemed to be dying with the heat. Water was scarce and what little was left in the springs seemed to ooze out like tears.

It was extremely hot within the convent. The European nuns felt the heat even more than the others did. When they saw the Bishop of Bethany, both Mother Edith and Sister Helen asked him how they could carry on with their work in such heat.

He had had only one thought in his mind ever since he had become the Bishop. How and when he could arrange for his novices to take the veil. He had decided on the date, too. September Twenty-first, the day he would turn forty-four. He could not ask for a better gift on his birthday. Such things like high temperatures did not worry him at all.

“Never mind,” he consoled them. “Everything will be alright.”

The day before they were to take the veil Mar Ivanios called the novices together. Only three of them would be taking the veil. Actually four girls had been selected but one of them was ill. Mar Ivanios was speaking to these selected girls in particular and to the others in general.

“You have been specially selected by God to follow the Lamb and sing His praises. You have already given up, I know, every worldly desire, so God will reward you a hundred fold in this life itself.”

He had called them for a retreat into the small church adjacent to the convent, in the evening. Suddenly the terrible heat seemed to die down and the skies darkened with thick black clouds. There was a clap of thunder and the rains came on the wings of a roaring wind and the cracked earth gratefully sucked in the life giving water.

The novices and Mar Ivanios could not help going to the window to look at the falling rain. They watched in awe as the trees tossed their heads in glee as the winds sped through them and the rain danced against them. How quickly the parched earth had

quenched its thirst and had cooled down! It had been nights since they had slept so soundly, and they woke up refreshed before sunrise.

They had waited ten long years for this day. Their dreams would now become a reality.

Mother Edith had herself cut and sewed three white habits and she now took them into the church. All the novices were dressed from head to toe in spotless white as they walked behind the three chosen ones. All of them except the three went into the church.

Never before in the history of the Malankara Church had such an investiture taken place. Large crowds gathered within the church to witness this important function, and they stood behind the novices holding lighted candles.

Mar Ivanios made his formal entry into the church, wearing the high-domed Bishop's hat and flowing robes. He lifted his wooden cross high and blessed the waiting congregation. The church doors were closed.

Then as the congregation waited within there was a knock at the door. "Who is it?" Mar Ivanios called out.

The noviates had been prepared for this moment and the answer came as planned. The doors were opened and Sosamma entered. "Shaina," said Mar Ivanios giving her, her new name. She was followed by Achamma who was named, "Hooba" and lastly came Saramma who was named "Denaha."

They walked in single file behind Mar Ivanios who went up to the chancel. They looked as happy as brides on their wedding day.

The service lasted four long hours. Thirumeni himself cut the hair of the three who stood with bent heads in front of him. He then gave each one of them the habits that had been sewn for them.

"You are the gold and frankincense and myrrh that is being presented to God. Shaina means peace, Hooba means love and Denaha means the dawn. May you be the beginning of a new order, of love and peace in our Church."

He felt a sense of having laid down a base, with the inauguration of the convent. There was a lot more work to be done and it was necessary to keep reminding his disciples of it. "God will punish us if we do not use the talents given to us. So none of us has the right to rest, for there is much for us to do."

And work they did. They and their teacher went about spreading light and the Good Word. Wherever they went they carried little piggy banks for people to donate from their savings. Even the slum dwellers reached out eagerly for these piggy banks, for it soon became a belief that whoever gave to Bethany would enjoy prosperity.

The money from these small savings was put away and used to build Bethany churches all over the country. Fourteen such churches came up and Ivanios Thirumeni stayed in each one and preached in the neighbourhood from there.

He found it necessary to distribute the work as no man could be expected to do all the work by himself. So each one was entrusted with the kind of work he was capable of. Soon after his baptism Yacob had undertaken the task of collecting *pidi ari*². The enthusiastic boy who left in the morning with a sack slung over his shoulder was not the same boy who returned, tired and dispirited. He recounted his sad experiences to his beloved Thirumeni.

“No one will give me anything. As soon as I enter their gates they shout ‘pulayan—pulayan’ and drive me out.”

“Did you have anything to eat at noon?”

“I did not even get a glass of cold water from any of the houses, Father.”

“From now on when you go out to collect *pidi ari* carry this little notebook and a pencil with you. Make a note of each abusive word that is thrown at you and bring it to me,” said Abo.

The next day as Yacob was leaving on his rounds, Abo called him back. “God will surely reward you for all the hard work you do for Bethany, but let me show you a way to live.”

Abo took a twig of the *pala* tree and taught him water divination. Yacob listened attentively and soon mastered the art.

Even after he had been consecrated a bishop, Mar Ivanios continued to visit the slums and mix with the people there. To the down-trodden *parayan*³ and *pulayan* he was a god, the god they could see on this earth. And they pleaded humbly that he at least would not

2 Pidi ari: Literally a handful of rice. Each housewife would after measuring out the rice to be cooked for the day take a handful and put it away to be given to the church.

3 parayan : a scheduled caste

treat them as the others did, no doubt prompted by past experience.

Even when they asked for conversion to Christianity, no one was willing to baptize them. And even if they did become Christians they knew they would not be allowed inside the churches.

“We know we will not be allowed into the church, so please baptize us and build a church for our use,” they pleaded sadly.

The bishop put his arms around them and said, “I will not allow you to be kept separate like that.” He called them together and spoke to them, giving them all the assurances he could, all the love they craved for, and the strength they needed. He walked with them all the way to Bethany, much to the consternation of the upper castes.

There were many things that needed to be changed. For instance in the Jacobite Church, the men stood in front and the women stood behind them. Women were not allowed in front. This irked Abo and he decided to push for a change.

“I would like to bring about a change in the seating arrangements in the churches of Bethany at least,” he announced one day. “Look at the way our weaker section, the ladies are not allowed to stand in front. They have to stand behind the men and they cannot see what is happening here in the chancel. Let’s bring about a change. From now onwards, when you stand facing the east, the women will stand on the right, and the men on the left.”

Bethany showed the way in many things. In all Bethany churches every group began to have certain definite objectives which they carried out. He began classes to teach religion to the young. Then he organized prayer groups in different areas and also started a women’s wing.

He did not like the idea of a few people singing in church while the others just stood there. He insisted that everyone sing or chant the prayers. Everyone had to raise his voice in praise. He also had prayer books printed and published so the services in all the churches would be the same.

Now that he had started a convent for women he had another idea, an idea that had lingered somewhere in his consciousness and which he now allowed to surface. A third kind of monastery, but this time for married people. He had also spoken about the idea to many people and occasionally even from the pulpit.

“Any married couple that wished to live a holy life could do so

in the third kind of monastery. They do not have to live according to the usual rules and regulations of a monastery or live celibate lives. All they had to do was to pick on some fault of theirs and do their best to wash it out of their systems every year. They would not have to give up their homes or marital status, either.”

Yacob used to submit the list of abuses he had collected each day along with the *pidi ari*. Abo used to carry the list with him wherever he went to give a sermon, and if he happened to be in the area where Yacob had been insulted he would introduce the topic and talk about it in a sarcastic manner. The audience laughed but they also understood the hidden rebuke in the words.

Through these sermons he hoped his listeners would each convert his home into a place of worship. Slowly his words began to have an effect on his people. The sound of prayer began to emanate from the homes of the faithful and fill the air both in the morning and evening. The men began to give up alcohol and that led to greater peace in the homes. In stead they began to take greater interest in church matters.

People brought their sick to him. He did what he could to heal them, but he also advised them on hygienic living, on living in a clean environment. “It is better to do what you can to prevent diseases than seek cures when they strike you, “ he would say. “If we change our habits, we can easily prevent a number of diseases.”

His idea of a third monastery was becoming a success. He maintained a punishing schedule to carry his ideas beyond the limits of Bethany. He travelled far and wide accepting as many invitations as he could to spread his message. On one such occasion he returned late at night after a long journey from Kunnamkulam. He was dreadfully tired and hungry and longed for his bed. Wearily he saddled his horse at the rest house at the base of Mundan Mala and rode up determined to go to bed at once. However, as he alighted from his horse, his nostrils were assailed by a strong stench. He could not imagine what it was for great stress was laid on cleanliness in the monastery.

He looked about him and soon found the source of the stench. The cowsheds had obviously not been cleaned for a couple of days, so the cows, including his favourite, were covered with dung and urine. None of them had been bathed for some time.

“I wonder whose duty it was to look after the cows this week,”

he thought. He remembered then that it was Yacob's duty that week. "But he is very particular about his work," he remembered. Then what could have happened? Without wasting time he rolled up his sleeves and fetched a spade and a basket and a broom and set to work. He cleaned the floor of the cowshed and collected the dung in the basket and dumped it in the pit meant for it. Only then did he call out to Yacob. Hearing the unexpected summons Yacob came out sleepily and stood in front of his master. He was startled by his master's appearance, his robes all splattered with cowdung.

"I have been ill for a couple of days," he stammered. "You must forgive me."

"I have cleaned out the cowshed," he said gently. "Now if you can, please bring me some water that I may wash myself."

Chapter 28

“We must make every effort to join some old church,” said His Grace Mar Dionysius to Abo. “Start correspondence for that immediately.”

It was a problem that weighed heavily on Mar Dionysius’ mind and he had sent for Abo to discuss it. A Synod consisting of the Catholicos and Mar Gregorios of Kundara had met to discuss this. However, Mar Dionysius did not attend the meeting, though he had called the meeting together. He was supposed to be resting, but he was actually in the next room. He was afraid that if it were made public that he had attended a meeting to discuss reunification, it would adversely affect their case in court.

All the same he privately sent for Mar Ivanios to his room and gave him a letter and some books and said, “This letter is from Patriarch Rahmani and is in response to the one we wrote him. Here are the prayer books and the order of service they use, which he has sent us. Please read them and take the necessary decision. What ever you decide will be acceptable to us all here.”

Mar Ivanios went back to the Synod with the books. Before the meeting began, the Catholicos who was presiding over the meeting said, “We are entrusting this work to you, Mar Ivanios. You can be assured of our full support.”

Mar Ivanios had much on his mind as he stood up to speak. “All the old churches like the Jacobite, the Nestorians, the Armenians etc., are truly all ancient. But none of them have grown, and I must say they are dying day by day. Then why not join a Church which has grown world wide?”

It was obvious from the expressions on their faces that his two listeners agreed with him. Mar Gregorios said, “In that case I suggest that you start a correspondence regarding that.”

Mar Ivanios then showed them the books Patriarch Rahmani had sent and his letter, which promised them acceptance into the Catholic fold.

Mar Gregorios held out his hand for the books and looked through them. The order of services for Holy Communion, ordination

of priests, and others had been translated into Syriac. The Catholicos said, "We suggest that you two bishops get together and go through the books carefully and find out if they are in keeping with our concepts. If they are acceptable start correspondence immediately."

"We are coming with you up to Tiruvalla," said Mar Gregorios to Mr Ivanios. "We shall sit there and examine these books and decide."

Together they went to the Bethany press in Tiruvalla. Abo had started a printing press in Tiruvalla with an old treadle press that Mother Edith had given him. He had used it to print pamphlets and books for distribution. He had also stored all the books relating to the church in the cupboards there. He took them all out and began comparing them with the books Patriarch Rahmani had sent.

"There is no difference at all," said Mar Gregorios joyfully.

"In that case I am going to Vakathanam, to meet His Holiness, the Catholicos, and apprise him of the matter. Then I shall prepare a reply to be sent to Patriarch Rahmani," said Abo. They embraced each other happily and took their leave of each other.

Mar Ivanios went straight to Vakathanam. He generally took a priest and a layman with him whenever he travelled. This time the lot fell to Mathews Achen of Paret and K.V.Chacko. The Catholicos was equally happy when he heard their news.

"We shall write the first letter ourselves," said the Catholicos, as he felt it would be a good thing for him to get in touch with the Patriarch at Beirut. Accordingly he wrote the first letter in Syriac and gave it to Abo. After that he maintained a regular correspondence with Patriarch Rahmani.

Advocate John Elenjikkal came to see him one day in Thirumoolapuram. He was in the habit of dropping in to discuss church matters with Abo. He had come now as he had heard about Patriarch Rahmani's letter regarding reunification and wanted to discuss it.

Abo showed him the letters and also an English translation of the first letter on the subject written by the Catholicos. John read the letter through carefully and said, "I know my thinking powers are not as good as yours; nevertheless I should like to make you aware of some things."

"Go ahead, and tell me frankly what you have in mind, Mr.

John,” said Abo.

“Is it really wise to forsake one Patriarch of Antioch for another Patriarch from Antioch, Your Grace? One is a Jacobite and the other has joined the Catholic Church. But both are Turks and their culture is very different from ours.”

“You are implying that it would be better to approach the Pope directly, aren’t you?” said Abo slowly.

“Yes, Your Grace.”

“But you are aware how difficult it is to make Rome take a decision quickly. ‘Rome moves slowly,’ is an old saying as you know.

John looked as if he had a solution up his sleeve for that. “The Roman Catholics in India have two groups following two different rites. The Latin and the Syro-Malabar. Why not join one of them, Your Grace?”

“That will not do, Mr. John. Latin Catholics belong to the Western Church. The Syro-Malabar group grew out of the Chaldean group. Neither of these will suit our tradition. There are eighteen groups under the Roman Catholic Church. Of these the only one that matches our tradition is the group to which Patriarch Rahmani belongs. So what else can we do?”

He was staring into the distance as he asked, “Suppose we start a new group with a new rite? A rite that combines the strong beliefs of the Roman Catholic Church and the ancient tradition of the Church of Antioch?”

A look of relief and happiness stole over John’s face as he heard the suggestion, but he could not help voicing a doubt. “Will Rome allow it? And if it does, Your Grace will have to wear yourself to the bone working for it.”

“I consider it a piece of good fortune to be given a chance to work for the children of God. You know how many of our people have moved away to other rites like the Syro-Malabar and the Latin as they cannot bear the squabbling in our Church. You have no idea how they are suffering under the change.”

“Oh, I know. I know for a fact that they cannot even arrange a marriage for their daughters within the community. Nor will our people accept proposals from them as they have left us. The old families of the Syro-Malabar regard them with contempt. Nor can they contemplate a match from the Latin group as they feel that the latter

belong to the fisher folk. “

“That’s precisely why I suggested the formation of a new group, Mr. John.”

Before taking his leave, John said earnestly, “Please, Your Grace, keep these things close to your heart. If by some chance we fail in our attempts, our enemies will have enough to ridicule us.”

“There’s one thing, though. Do I as a bishop of the Jacobite church have the right to approach the Pope directly? Or should I go through a Catholic bishop?”

“I am not quite sure of the ramifications, Your Grace. I shall however, look into the matter and give Your Grace the information tomorrow.”

“As far as possible one should not postpone such matters to the morrow. Bishop Kalasherry is at the Bishop’s House in Changanacherry, I hear. I think I shall go and meet him tonight.”

Changanacherry was not too far away, so he decided to see him that night. He made a rapid review of what he would say to the Catholic Bishop. Then he sent Yacob to the Melamparambil house. “Go and ask for their car. I want to go to Changanacherry.”

Thampi, the driver, drove into the garden of the monastery. Mar Ivanios and Chacko Kilileth got in and they set off to see the Catholic Bishop. They arrived at the high gate by half-past ten in the night.

“Is the Bishop at home?” he asked the gatekeeper.

The poor man could not see who it was, but he answered respectfully all the same. “Yes, he is. But he must have gone to bed by now.”

“Never mind. Just show me his room. Better come with me.”

Before Thampi could open the car door for him His Grace got out and walked fast towards the building. When they reached the second floor, the gatekeeper pointed out the room. It was unusual for him to receive any visitors so late in the night so Bishop Kalasserry called out, “Who is there?”

“I am the Bishop of Bethany, Mar Ivanios.”

A surprised and pleased Bishop opened the door wide and welcomed his visitor with a hug. “This is a pleasant surprise, and at this time of the night, too.”

Mar Ivanios told him of their desires. Doubts were raised and answered. “I would suggest a direct approach to the Pope for reunifi-

cation. Our letters have to go through the Indian Delegate. We cannot correspond directly with the Pope. But you, as a Bishop of the Jacobite Church can write directly to the Pope.”

As he took leave Mar Ivanios recalled an old Catholic priest he knew. Father John Ribeiro, now retired and resting in his house in Mavelikara. He had studied in Rome and had earned his degrees there. He would surely give him all the information necessary to approach the Pope, he thought.

He set out for Mavelikara the very next day. Father Ribeiro himself wrote the first letter to the Pope, and then added, “I know Your Grace is very busy, so I shall come to Mundan Mala and teach Your Grace all about the Roman Catholic Church. Just let me know when Your Grace can meet me there.”

“I am usually there every Saturday. That is the only day I can spend some time in meditation and prepare for Mass the next day. Come on any Saturday and we can talk, that is if your health permits.”

After sending the first letter to Rome he wrote to Edward Mooney living in Bangalore, the Apostolic Delegate in India. He also wrote to the Bishop of Quilon, Dr Aloysius Benziger, asking him to recommend his case to Rome; the formation of a new group with Syrian rites under the Roman Catholic Church.

He had a lot on his plate. Guiding the destiny of Bethany was an important task, but so was the work of reunification with the Catholic Church. He had a lot of travelling to do, but he tried to spend as many days as was possible in Mundan Mala. Everybody came to meet him there. Fifty visitors in a day was not unusual at all. People came there for various reasons. Some came to see the monastery, and some came to invite him to a function. Others came to attend a retreat, and yet others came to learn about the monastic life. Not all were Christians, either. The Hindus and the Muslims also came. And so did the foreigners.

He met them all and enjoyed conversing with them and showing them his monastery. He always enjoyed these sessions.

One day he was seated under a spreading *jambul*⁴ tree after bidding some visitors goodbye. One of the orphan children lay in his

4 jambul: rose-apple

ap obviously ill. Father Job of Thengumtharayil came to him with his medicine in a glass. Everyone believed in Father Job's medicines. He was supposed to be able to heal the most incurable of diseases.

Once a man, bitten by a snake, was brought up the hill from one of the slums in the area. They all knew Father Job and his medicines, as it was he, who invariably accompanied Abo on his rounds in the slum areas. After examining the wound on the man's leg, Father Job decided on the species of snake that had bitten him. He then went into the forest found a plant that had medicinal properties. He ground its leaves and extracted the juice from it then gave it to the patient to swallow along with some ground pepper. He rubbed a few leaves in his palms and then put it on the wound and bandaged it. The patient who had been given up for dead by other medicine men, revived and was soon well. From that day onwards, Father Job acquired a great reputation as a healer.

Father Job gave the child his dose of medicine and waited. Abo sat stroking the child's head, soothing him. As he sat there, Chacko Kilileth arrived. "Your Grace, I have found the kind of sites you would like for your monasteries or churches. Several in fact and all on the slopes of hills. What should I do about them?"

His Grace liked land on the slopes of hills. The higher you went up, the purer the air, and the more peaceful it would be. And there would always be a good breeze. All the land he had acquired for Bethany were on hillsides. He had therefore instructed Chacko to be on the lookout for such sites.

"What shall we do for money, Chacko? Alexios Achen says our situation is rather tight. Anyhow go ahead and give what money we have as an advance and make sure of the land. We'll find the means for it."

"Another thing, Your Grace, we have to construct churches on the land we already have. The people in the surrounding areas are ready to join the church as soon as the church buildings come up. They are in fact waiting to do so."

The Bishop pondered over the problem of finding funds for his projects. "Send Alexander Shemmashen of Attupurath to me. Yacob, too."

Chacko did as he was bid and soon the deacon and Yacob came to him.

His Grace spoke first to Yacob. "Remember the skill I taught you? How to find water? How many wells have you divined so far?"

"Seven, my Lord," he said humbly.

"Excellent. Tomorrow you will accompany me to Kunnumkulam where I am going to conduct a retreat in the Arthat Church. Many people will gather there. At the end of the retreat I will speak to them about your ability to divine water. How you can find water that does not dry up in the hottest summers and the wells will not be very deep, either. You will have people approaching you for water divination. I shall tell them to pay you according to their financial status always bearing in mind that the money will go towards the Bethany projects." Yacob was delighted at this job.

Turning to the deacon the Bishop said, "We have to build two more churches. What can you do about it? Money is scarce, so your plans should suit our pockets."

The Bishop was aware of the deacon's special ability. He had come to the monastery a year ago but he had already designed two beautiful churches and had also built them. Any architect would agree that they were beautiful, strong and compact.

He had been placed in charge of the Bethany Press in Tiruvalla, but his heart was in building churches. He had found ways and means of cutting costs and he expounded on them to His Grace, who, except for minor changes here and there accepted all his plans.

The sun was in the west now bathing the hill in its saffron glow. Someone was slowly coming up the hill. Everyone stopped to watch his progress. He was near enough now for them to realize that the stranger was a deacon. A well-built man obviously, with a thick dark beard on his shining face. As he came up he saw Abo seated in the garden with the sick orphan in his lap. "That's the life for me," the expression on his face seemed to say as he gazed at Mar Ivanios.

He came forward and knelt at Abo's feet.

"Who are you?" asked Abo.

"My name is John and I come from Omallur. I belong to the Kuzhimepurath family," he said.

"I see. And what are your educational qualifications?"

"I have passed the Intermediate. I would like to join your monastery, Your Grace. I hope I will be accepted."

"What made you decide on such a course? Why have you not

studied further?"

It was necessary to gauge the depth of his desire. Would it be a long lasting one or a flash in the pan? The deacon explained. "I have always wanted to live an ascetic life. But I made up my mind to do so only after hearing Your Grace speak at the Makamkunnu convention this year."

Mar Ivanios had distributed collection boxes or piggy banks to the congregation exhorting them to donate what they could for the orphans of Bethany. The deacon had immediately pulled out all the money he had. Not much. Just enough for his bus fare to go back home. He dropped all the money into a collection box and walked the distance home.

"The ascetic's life is not one you try out for a few months. It is something you have to be sure of," Thirumeni advised.

He had one more experience to relate. He had once met Bishop Kurialasherry of Changanacherry diocese and the Bishop had blessed him saying that he would one day make a good catholic. "If that is to happen, Your Grace, my heart tells me I must join the monastery there."

Abo looked at him intently, then smiled. The others were amused. "Where did you meet Bishop Kurialasherry?" asked Abo.

"I was staying with my brother in Pala and was attending St. Thomas College there. The Bishop was invited to a function there and I was the one who gave the welcome speech. His Grace appreciated my speech and blessed me then."

Abo looked at the others and said, "Take him inside. Let us praise the Lord for bringing a prospective Catholic to us. "

Chapter 29

It was Good Friday. The saddest day in the whole of Lent. All the residents of the monastery observed silence. Abo himself observed a punishing schedule of fasting and abstinence during the whole of Lent, which was even more strict during the Passion week. It was as if he felt that it was not enough to be near God but one had to become like God and his prayers were therefore more ardent. Occasionally, his soft voice could be heard, expounding the Bible, enabling his disciples to follow him into the same ecstasy that he felt.

“Moses was given the Ten Commandments after he had fasted and prayed on Mount Sinai. The prophet Elias doubled his spiritual strength after his fasting and prayer on Mount Carmel, and the Holy Spirit descended on the Apostles after they had spent ten days in fasting and prayer. The Angel Gabriel appeared to Mary and told her about the Son that was to be born to her in the season of fasting and prayer. Jesus Christ Himself spent forty days and nights fasting and praying in the desert before he overcame the temptations of Satan. “

The Passion Week services were conducted in the church at the bottom of the hill, but the resonance of the church bell could be heard everywhere.

Bethany was famous for the Passion Week services. People came from far and wide to hear Mar Ivanios chant the prayers. Even non-Christians came to attend the services. Men, women and children came to hear him, and they came by boat or bullock carts or walked the whole way.

They also observed the fast and repented and observed a vow of silence until the end of the Passion Week. Thirumeni also used to spend two hours everyday during the Week giving sermons, and his people made every effort to be there to hear him.

For the first thirty days he spoke on one theme to an enthralled audience. They felt they were being fed the food of gods as they heard his talks. Practically everyone came from the school in Thirumoolapuram. There were two European nuns this year. One of them was Sister Helen who came every year, but the other, Sister Doreen, had come here for the first time. She had been sent for by

Mother Edith to work in the school.

All the nuns who came had put away their bags and umbrellas and other possessions in the rest house at the bottom of the hill and had then proceeded to walk the remaining half-mile to the church. They were now all absorbed in prayer. The candles were lit and Mar Ivanios had begun to lead the service. Everyone standing within and outside the church listened to the sonorous voice of the prelate. One never tired of hearing him chant the prayers.

When the first part was over it was time to read the Bible. The deacon who was to read it that day picked up the Bible and came forward and began to read the appointed portion for the day. He had just begun on the text after announcing the chapter and verse when Abo sternly ordered him to stop.

Everyone was startled. Something had displeased Thirumeni. No one understood what the matter was. Then Thirumeni spoke in a stern voice, "Shemmasha, you did not read the text correctly. Read it carefully."

The deacon read the passage as before. Then came the same angry voice. "Didn't I ask you to read it correctly? Remember that you are reading the Word of God. Do not make mistakes."

Abo's face was taut with anger. His eyes seemed to burn. It was the first time anyone had seen him so angry. The deacon tried to justify himself. "I only read what was printed in the Book," he muttered.

Mar Ivanios bounded forward and snatched the Book from the deacon's hands and threw it on to the table in front and growled, "What bad translation!"

Then he took up his own Syriac Bible, effortlessly found the right chapter and verse and translating impromptu asked the deacon to repeat the verses after him. The next minute Abo was his old self again.

The next part of the service was a very solemn one. Thirumeni lifted the big wooden cross and hoisted it on to his shoulders for the procession re-enacting Jesus Christ's painful journey up the hill of Calvary. The crowd lined up behind him.

His mind was full of that sad experience. It seemed to him that he himself was going through the same experience that Christ did. As he walked forward on legs that trembled with the weight of the

cross, he beat his breast and chanted in an anguished voice, "Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for your children and your children's children."

The crowd listened in tearful silence. They looked at Abo as if they were actually seeing Christ carrying the cross. Even during the interval the crowd was silent. Mundan Mala had become Golgotha for them. They crowded under the shade of the trees in silence and contemplation. The whole service would end with a sermon from the prelate.

He sat in a chair and faced the congregation with his eyes shut. The words just seemed to flow out of his mouth and the people who had not found a place inside the church thronged at the windows to hear his every word. His theme was the wounds of Christ.

He related it to the present day world. Each squabble in the Church was another wound, he said. And the congregation, including the European nuns, listened spellbound.

Not quite, for though Sister Helen understood Malayalam, Sister Doreen did not. Sister Helen did her best to keep translating to her companion, but she soon became engrossed and forgot to translate. After a while Sister Doreen got bored and left her seat quietly and slipped out of the church and set out for the rest house half a mile away.

She put away her prayer books in the rest house and walked out for a breath of fresh air. The sun had not yet set. She wondered if she could go for a walk. She had heard Sister Helen speak of a large rock formation up on the hill somewhere, jut right for sitting on in meditation. She would go in search of that, she thought and started climbing. She soon came upon the rock, and started climbing holding on to the bushes by the side. The rock was fully shaded by the trees that leaned over it like a canopy that shut out the sky. She climbed up and sat cross-legged there and shut her eyes.

Her mind was still filled with thoughts of the Saviour's torture and crucifixion. Slowly her breathing slowed down and she began to forget her surroundings. She was filled with a strange burning experience and so did not hear the twittering of the birds as they returned to their nests. Nor did she realize that the sun had set.

The sermon ended and the congregation dispersed to eat the only meal of the day. It was rice gruel with lentils. There were no

dishes so each one dug a little hole in the ground and put in a huge leaf of the teak tree. The gruel and the lentils were served into that which they then spooned up using a leaf of the jack tree fashioned into a spoon. And so they ended their fast that day.

Sister Helen went back to the rest house and was surprised to find her companion missing. But her prayer books were in its usual place, so it was clear she had returned to the rest house. The night grew dark. "Doreen——Doreen," she called out and got no response.

She went out and asked the watchman if he had seen Sister Doreen. "I saw her leave her books in her room and go outside."

"Which way did she go? Why?" asked Sister Helen anguished.

"I thought she was just going for a walk," said the watchman.

Alarm stole into Sister Helen's blue eyes. She picked up a hurricane lamp and went out searching for her friend. The other nuns immediately went about the place looking for her and so did the watchman who lit a torch before going out in search of her. They all returned disappointed.

No one knew what to do. The forest was thick and night had fallen. Had she wandered into the forest and lost her way? Had she perhaps fallen into some pit and was now lying there unable to get out? Or, God forbid, had some wild animal attacked her and ——! No! No!

Sister Helen's eyes filled with tears and her lips trembled. She made the sign of the cross and prayed, "Oh! God! Please help us."

She did not wait another minute. She called the watchman and together they went up to the church to seek Abo's help.

The services were all over, but Abo was still in the church, kneeling in front of the altar with arms outstretched, and looking like a carved image as he prayed. His disciples were also lost in prayer. How could she break his concentration? But was there any other way?

With a heavy heart she knocked at the door.

Thirumeni slowly turned round. In the light of the hurricane lantern he saw Sister Helen's tear-filled face and he came out immediately. Before he could say a word Sister Helen burst out. "Sister Doreen is missing. The watchman says he saw her go up the hill."

Abo called out to the disciples. "Our Sister Doreen is missing. Looks like she has gone into the forest and has lost her way there. Go

They lit torches of palm leaves and each went in a different direction. They clapped their hands and banged on tins, and kept calling out to elicit a response from the missing nun. "Sister!—— Sister!"

They only heard their sounds echoing back. Perhaps that kept the wild animals at bay.

Abo himself set out with his lantern. He traced the route from the church back to the rest house and then searched within the rest house in the faint hope of finding her. When they saw Thirumeni, the nuns whimpered in grief, but did not say anything as they were observing silence. Thirumeni soothed their fears. "Why are you crying?" he asked softly. "We are all in God's hands. Sister Doreen will be alright."

He walked into the deep forest. As he went along he could hear the others call out, but there was no response. About three hours passed with no luck. Everyone was tired. Thirumeni, with tears running down his face, prayed to God as he went forward, "Oh God of our fathers! You who saved Daniel from the lion's den, please keep our dear sister safe."

Even then he could hear voices crying out, "Sister——— Sister."

And then they heard a faint response. It came from somewhere within the forest. Surely that was her voice calling out, "I'm here! — I'm here!"

Even as he turned away sure of her safety, he heard the big church bell ring. Then after giving thanks to God he went back and watched as his people helped her down to the rest house. When Sister Helen saw her friend she hugged her and burst out crying. "Where have you been all this while?"

"I'm ever so sorry," Sister Doreen said feeling guilty. "I went up to that big rock to sit in meditation, and lost track of the time. It became so dark I could not find my way back."

Abo and a couple of deacons came to meet her. She was too frightened to even look at his stern face. "I am extremely sorry this happened. Please forgive me."

Those who were with him held their breath wondering what he would say. But he, very gently said, "Do not let it happen again."

Abo and his disciples went back to the monastery. They had

spent a whole day fasting, so now they went straight to the dining hall and had their share of the rice gruel prepared for the evening. After that meagre dinner they went to bed, thanking God for all His mercies.

Then something happened which startled everyone. The Bishop's eyes filled with tears as his eyes fell on one of the young deacons. It was the same deacon whom he had humiliated in the church.

"I scolded you for the bad translation of the Bible. For God's sake, Shemmashen, you must forgive me," he said as the tears spilled over.

Unbelievable! His Grace Geevarghese Mar Ivanios of Bethany was apologizing to a mere deacon!

The young deacon fell at the Bishop's feet. "I consider myself lucky, if Your Grace scolds me," he sobbed.

Chapter 30

Lent was a time for subduing the body, and he had chosen to lie on a gravel-covered mat. He did not feel the pain however. Rather he was happy and at peace with himself. His model was St. Francis of Assisi, who used to roll on rose bushes to subdue his body. He had not been able to do as much, but he could at least be at peace on gravel. It was the night following Good Friday and he preferred the silence of that period to the joy of Palm Sunday. So now he lay there on the gravel-covered mat, glad that he could bear at least this discomfort for Jesus.

It must be getting on for four o' clock in the morning, he thought. The chattering of the birds told him that much. Time to get up and say his morning prayers. It did not matter that he had spent all night in prayer, but now the morning prayers had to be said. Then he turned up the wick of the lamp and pulled out some heavy tomes from his bookshelves and sat down at his table. They were Bibles in Hebrew and Syriac. He also pulled out the dictionaries of the Bibles, and lastly some blank sheets of paper and a pen.

He was determined to make a correct translation of the Bible. They should not have to depend on the bad translations of the Protestant Bible which was the only one they had to date. The translation made by the Bible Society of India had not been very accurate as they had used the English Bible for translation into Malayalam, which explained why the language of the Malayalam Bible was so stilted and the ideas so incorrect. It would be necessary to translate directly from the language used by Jesus Himself to bring out a really good Bible in Malayalam.

There was no lack of pundits in Syriac and in Malayalam but it would be his good fortune to produce the first Bible translated directly from the original languages.

He had fortunately completed the first part of his life story, so now he could use the five hours from four to nine in the morning for the translation of the Bible. The rest of the time could be spent for his normal work, teaching, discussing or writing to Rome. He should be able to finish translating the New Testament at least by the end of the year.

What should be the title of his life story, he wondered. He tried out a few titles in his mind before finally settling on “Giri Deepam” or “The Light On The Hill”. Once he had decided on the title he sent for Deacon Alexander and handed over the manuscript to him. “Please take this to our press in Tiruvalla and have it printed,” he said.

As he turned back to his writing, the deacon asked curiously, “What is Your Grace writing in such a hurry?”

“I have a lot to write, my son. We need a good translation of the Bible, urgently. Then I have to carry on with my correspondence with Rome.”

“Your Grace has been writing to Rome for three years now without much response. Wouldn’t it be simpler to join the Latin or the Syro-Malabar group?” asked the deacon who was aware that His Grace was hoping to persuade Rome to allow a new Church with Syrian rites in the Catholic fold. It was because he had no hopes of a successful outcome that he voiced his protest.

Mar Ivanios smiled as he replied. “If your neighbour and you have similar houses would you say it was enough to bring up your child in your neighbour’s house. Would not the child grow up with a confused identity?”

The deacon had no answer, so he picked up the manuscript and left the cell.

The Court verdict was enough to make the hearts of all in the Metropolitan’s faction leap for joy. It was an elixir that would restore life to all of them. The Malayala Manorama splashed the news on its front pages. Four years ago the verdict had gone against them in the *Vattipanam* case, but they had appealed against it and now the verdict had come vindicating their stand. All earthly powers had been restored to His Grace Geevarghese Mar Dionysius once again. All their schools and the Old Seminary which had been taken away were in his hands once again.

Kottayam was jubilant at the victory, but Mar Ivanios stayed aloof from all this celebration. “This is no real victory,” he told his disciples in Bethany. “The real victory will come when we become part of the Catholic Church.”

There was another who had the same ideas. Father Philipose of Cheppad. He was an ardent admirer of Mar Ivanios, and he was not elated over the verdict, either. He locked the church in Cheppad and

put the keys away in his house and then went to the tomb of the late Mar Dionysius of Cheppad and sat in prayer. Then he made his way to Thirumoolapuram where Mar Ivanios was residing after Lent.

Abo was very happy to see this intelligent, capable, and celibate priest. "The Bethany churches have grown in number. We now have many mission centres, too. I want you to write an article on what the real faith is and I want you to have it printed and distributed in the churches."

Father Philipose was a writer and this demand on his abilities pleased him greatly. Until now, Abo had spoken of his efforts to reunite with the Catholic Church only to his personal secretary Father Yakub. Now he had found another sympathizer in Father Philipose.

The joy that the court verdict brought, soon spread to Bethany also. Mar Dionysius himself sent him the news. He, Abo, was going to be made a Metropolitan. And Father Yakub would be made a Bishop. It was good news indeed.

Father Yakub was soon made a Ramban. Six weeks earlier the second Catholicos had gone to his eternal rest and his place was taken over by Mar Gregorios of Kundara who became the new Catholicos..

That same day, Abo was installed as Metropolitan of Bethany and the next day Ramban Yakub was consecrated as Mar Theophilus. Bethany now had a greater name than ever.

The ceremony had taken place in the M.D.Seminary. His admirers were overjoyed by this new honour given to Abo. He was the jewel in the crown. And from now onwards he would have power to establish new Bethany churches in any of the seven dioceses of the Church wherever it was required.

His disciples crowded round him jubilantly and a snapshot of him with his disciples was taken as a record for all time. Among them were Father Mathews of Paret and Father Joseph of Valakuzhy. Both of them had come to receive his blessings. Father Joseph had been ordained just sixteen days before.

Father Mathews inquired about the progress of reunification with the Catholic Church.

"What difference does it make if we accord the Roman Pope the same allegiance that we give to the Patriarch of Antioch? But will it be allowed or not is the question."

Father Mathews had some doubts though he agreed with

Abo's sentiments. "I appreciate the stand Your Grace has taken. It is good for all the churches to unite. But if we join them will we not lose our way of worship?"

"Suppose we keep our way of worship in spite of uniting with the Catholic Church?" queried Abo with a small secret smile.

"Nothing could be better," said Mathews Achen. "Of course no concrete steps can be taken in this direction as long as Mar Dionysius is alive. He would never be able to bear it. "

"When I am convinced of the truth, I will not hesitate to leave even His Grace," said the Metropolitan firmly.

Father Joseph's brow was furrowed as he heard this. Leave the Jacobite Church! Join the Roman Catholic Church! It was unthinkable! He had been born and reared in a Jacobite family, and hoped to die in it. Nor he did approve of anyone belittling the Jacobite Church.

Yet how could he oppose his beloved teacher? He was not a member of the monastery, but he had nothing but admiration for his Metropolitan and Bethany. He often remembered the way Abo had bared his back to him and had ordered him to strike him with a cane. All the same he could not help voicing his objection.

"We have won the court case, haven't we? Then why think of joining the Roman Catholic Church?" he asked.

"What has the case to do with the reunification?" the Metropolitan asked with a smile. "Go back to what is right, that is all."

"But the synod considered reunification when we had lost the *Vattipanam* case. There is no need of it now," Father Joseph said stubbornly.

He might be his junior, but Abo considered his objection carefully. "I am only carrying out the work given to me by the synod. I am not going to go back on it now. No man who puts his hand on a plough and takes it back has a right to enter the Kingdom of God."

Chapter 31

The Church leaders were beginning to feel uneasy. Bethany was becoming a mite too independent. Besides the Bethany Metropolitan's disciples were growing much too attached to their institution and their loyalties to the Church were waning. Father Philipose of Chepad, for example would have to be drawn away from Bethany, or else he would soon belong to Bethany alone.

Even Valia Thirumeni, Geevarghese Mar Dionysius who had always supported the idea of complete autonomy for Bethany was now beginning to have doubts. He did not approve of the slight modifications made in the prayer books in use in Bethany. Not that the changes were fundamental. But it had to be admitted that the *Thubden*¹ had been changed. In stead of mentioning and praying for all the bishops in the Church as is customary, only the Bethany bishops were mentioned and prayed for in the Bethany churches. That was definitely intolerable. Especially now when the High Court had bestowed all authority on Mar Dionysius.

Of late Bethany had distanced itself from all the associations of the Jacobite Church. They no longer sent any representatives to meetings or took part in any deliberations of the Church. Nor were their accounts presented for auditing to the Church Committee.

It would be dangerous to allow Bethany to go on in this fashion. At this rate they might go away *en bloc* to the Roman Catholic Church. A most unwelcome thought, indeed.

It was public knowledge now that Bethany had a definite leaning toward the Catholic Church. Both the Catholicos and Valia Thirumeni Mar Dionysius had gone to Bethany and pleaded with Mar Ivanios, but nothing could make give him up what he felt was his mission. Instead he openly acknowledged his intentions of joining the Catholic Church. This was why, it was now necessary to remove Father Philipose from Bethany's influence.

Suddenly there was a drop in the number of bishops in the

1. Thubden: intercessory prayers

Church. The second Catholicos had passed away and so had Mar Joachim of Kandanad, more or less at the same time and Mar Gregorios of Kundara had become the new Catholicos. It was therefore necessary to consecrate two more bishops, and the Church had, in fact, chosen two priests for the purpose. One was Father Joseph Pulikkottil and the other was Father Philipose of the Vanchiyil family in Cheppad. Both were good speakers and writers and were spiritually all that was expected. Father Joseph had already been made a Ramban in Kunnampulam. Now Father Philipose would have to be recalled from Bethany.

Father Philipose had always been attracted to Bethany and once he had joined it he had immersed himself in the work there. He had no desire to leave the place and he paid no heed to anyone's persuasions. To him Bethany was a shade he had found while toiling in the heat of the sun and he was not prepared to leave that shade. Ultimately the Catholicos himself went to Bethany to persuade Father Philipose to leave the shelter of Bethany and work for the Church.

"It is the decision of the Synod that Father Philipose be made Ramban," said the Catholicos. "He must be released at once."

"He did not come here at my behest," said Abo. "So I cannot ask him to leave."

The Catholicos turned away quite annoyed.

Abo and Father Philipose stood at the door and watched the Catholicos leave in anger. Suddenly Abo laughed.

"Why is Your Grace laughing?" inquired Father Philipose.

"I happened to recall a couple of sentences in a letter that the Catholicos wrote while he was still a bishop, to the late Catholicos Mar Baselios the Second," said Abo.

"What did he write?" asked the priest in surprise.

"He wrote, 'Ours is quite a hopeless Church. I am sorry I was ever born into such a Church.'"

"That must have been why he hoped for reunification with the Catholic Church while he was a Bishop," opined Father Philipose.

"Strange! The Bishop who was in the Synod which authorized me to correspond with Rome for reunification is now ordering me not to go on with it," said Mar Ivanious. "And he is asking me to surrender Bethany's independence."

A few days later two letters arrived at Bethany from the

Catholicate. One was to Abo and the other to Father Philipose. Abo opened both letters and read them as letters were never given to the residents unopened and unread. Both the recipients had been threatened with excommunication.

“Do you have any desire to leave this place and become a bishop?” asked Abo.

Father Philipose thought for a minute or two before he answered. “Yes, I should like to go and become a bishop, but I will come back to Your Grace, the minute Your Grace decides to join the Catholic Church.”

“In that case, you may go.”

And so Father Philipose left with Abo’s blessings, to be ordained a Ramban. And Mar Ivanios turned to his work in Bethany. There was a lot of work to be done.

The facilities available to look after the orphans, and the patients in their hospitals were not enough. Malaria stalked all the villages in the eastern hills, and there was no one to look after the victims. Even relatives abandoned them. There were cases of very sick patients being rolled up in mats and buried while they were still alive, so greatly did the simple village folk fear malaria. How could he, Abo, abandon them? He would have to extend his work to cover all such areas.

How could he find the funds for all this? The only wealth the Institution had were the various plots of land bought with the sole purpose of building churches on them. He had already built many churches and many were being constructed. It would not be wise to make any move to sell these plots. He would have to find another way to make money.

Luckily Deacon Attupurath returned from the mission he had been sent on. “All the copies of ‘Giri Deepam’ have been sold Your Grace, and I have handed over the money to Father Alexios. There is a great demand for more copies.”

“Wonderful. Now give half of that amount to our hospital here, and give the rest to the school for *pulaya* children in Thirumoolapuram,” said Abo.

A home for the destitute had been opened at the bottom of Mundan Mala, but it was now in trouble for lack of funds. A school for *pulaya* children denied admission in the ordinary schools, had

been opened near the convent in Thirumoolapuram, but it was languishing for want of money. Their plans to teach skills like tailoring and weaving could not be carried out for lack of necessary funds. So Abo sent for Father Alexios.

“You know what our financial situation is like, don’t you? I do not know who I can approach for funds. I have received all the money that various people had promised and can expect no more. I am now wondering if it would do any good if I sent you to Singapore. Will you go?”

“Certainly.”

“Do not go for the sake of money alone. Many of our people are living there. I would like you to do something to strengthen our people’s faith in our Church and for unity. The fact that they are living in foreign lands should not be an excuse for them to leave the faith.”

“Then shall I carry with me the books and articles that Your Grace has written and published and distribute them there?” asked Father Alexios.

“I leave it to you to decide.”

Father Alexios left to make arrangements for his journey across the seas.

Meanwhile Father Philipose came back to Bethany as Ramban Philipose. So now there were three in the monastery who wore the *Masanapsa*. He went straight to see his teacher and tell him all about the ordination and the others crowded round to hear of his ordination in Parumala by the Catholicos himself.

“Did you inform Valia Thirumeni that you were returning to this place?” asked Abo.

“I requested both the Catholicos and Valia Thirumeni to allow me to return to work here in Bethany. But neither of them cared to listen to my pleas, instead I was given another job to do.”

“And what job was that?” inquired Abo.

“The Church has run up many debts in connection with the *Vattipanam* case, and I was therefore asked to go round the various parishes and collect money to repay those debts.”

“What did you say to that?”

“I informed them that it was my desire to return to my work in Bethany and keep away from the court cases and the work in

connection with it. I was then asked about the plans for reunification with the Catholic Church, and that led to a criticism of Your Grace.”

Abo heard it but made no comments. “I was then told,” continued the Ramban, “that we had gone away from the Catholics and that our ancestors had sworn that they would never again have anything to do with them. So then I could not help asking if it was wrong to obey St. Peter’s successors.”

Abo looked up. He looked at the Ramban with a new respect. He admired anyone who had the guts to speak out his mind. “What did they say to that?” he inquired.

The Ramban suddenly became tongue-tied. “Go on, tell me what they said,” Abo urged.

The Ramban looked up sadly. “They said — Your Grace— Your Grace —was a cheat.”

Abo’s eyes filled with tears. To think that it was his beloved teacher, nay someone as good as his father, who had said it. Said it of him who had stood by the Metropolitan in every difficult situation. Was this his thanks to him?

He had publicly stated that he, Abo, was a cheat. In what way had he cheated anyone?

Mar Dionysius himself had asked him to find ways and means to join another Church. In fact a synod of bishops had been called together to discuss this matter and he had been entrusted with that work. For the last four and a half years he had been working single-mindedly for that very purpose. If he had in any way ignored the job entrusted to him he could have been called a cheat.

How could he be called a cheat he thought! Surely it was they, the Bishops of the Jacobite Church who had cheated? At one point of time they had been anxious to join the Catholic Church but had gone back on their plans? Surely they were the cheats? Deciding to leave the church when the court verdict went against you and deciding to stay on when the verdict was for you was actually cheating. And yet it was he who had been called a cheat. Abo was very bitter.

His teacher’s accusations were like whip lashes on his mind, but the thought that his efforts were bearing fruit was a reward in itself. The latest letter from Rome hinted at it.

He had no idea how many would be prepared to go with him to the Catholic Church. At first he had thought that the whole of the

Metropolitan faction would join the Catholic Church. But now that the court verdict was in their favour he was not sure how many would want to change. He decided that he would carry on for one could not stop halfway on the road fearing what lay ahead. He would have to carry on until he attained his goal.

He had to make sure of Bethany's future, however. For eleven long years he had worked for it and now he could not see his efforts go waste. He had to do something to preserve it, but what? He decided to consult his disciples. Ramban Philipose was of the opinion that Bethany should continue in the hills.

Abo was holding on to Mar Theophilus for support as he walked in the garden. It was clear he was very agitated. But he stopped when he heard the Ramban's opinion.

"That will create a lot of trouble, Ramban. As soon as we join the Catholic Church we will be asked to vacate these premises. I am sure a group of people will come here demanding that. They will be followed by another equally vociferous group claiming that since the Bishop of Bethany had been given all power in Mundan Mala to carry on his work as he thought fit, it was only fair that he be allowed to remain. This argument will lead to fisticuffs and very soon we will have a blood bath here," said Abo.

"Bethany and all its property is in Your Grace's name. No one can take it away from you legally, Your Grace. Even if we had to go to court we would emerge victors," argued the Ramban.

"I retreated into this world because I was tired of courts and lawsuits. No one who opts for a monastic life can file a lawsuit. I have given up everything in life so I am not prepared to fight anyone for any property. "

"In that case suppose Your Grace transfers all this property on to the name of Mar Dioysius or the Catholicos and join the Catholic Church?" It was the peace loving Mar Theophilus who said it.

He stopped his furious pacing and thought for a moment before answering the younger bishop. "That's not very wise. Bethany has grown with the generous charity of innumerable people. They donated money freely because it was absolutely free of all fetters. So now if we were to hand it over to Valia Thirumeni or any other leader of the Church it would not be right. When the donors realize that their money has been handed over to the strife-torn Jacobite church,

and that Bethany will lose its individuality, they might well file a suit in court.”

Everyone was amazed at Abo’s far sightedness. Abo went on explaining his stand. “Moreover, the Church is even now involved in lawsuits. Suppose, just suppose, the Patriarch’s faction wins the next round, Bethany will then go to them, and by and by, Bethany will stop growing and die a natural death.”

No one had anything to say after that. After a short silence Abo said. “I have other plans in mind.”

His listeners looked at him with awe.

“I shall create a trust in the name of all those who donated money to Bethany and hand Bethany over to the trust. Then we shall join the Catholic Church.”

Everyone was satisfied by this solution.

Only those who had donated more than one hundred rupees were included in the list of trustees. Those who had donated less than a hundred rupees had been informed earlier that their money would be used for daily expenses, so their names had not been mentioned in the list of donors.

The invitations were printed in the Bethany Press and the residents of the monastery were tired of writing the names and addresses. All the donors in the list were invited and the details regarding the transfer of deeds were published in the papers.

The donors came to Mundan Mala, to the guest house where mats had been spread on the floor for them to sit on. There were so many that they spilled over onto the verandah and the room behind. The Catholics and the Marthomites and the Hindus and the Muslims all rubbed shoulders with each other as they settled down amicably on the mats.

They were given a refreshing drink of wild honey mixed with water in earthen cups. All of them had at one time or another visited Bethany; so they were accustomed to this.

Abo then rose to speak. He spoke about Bethany and its growth and ended by saying, “We have used the money you so kindly donated for the expansion of Bethany. Now we plan to give back all the properties and money in its name into your hands to be used as best as you can. We shall do exactly as you decide. It is all in my name but I shall hand it all over to you exactly as you decide.”

This was followed by a reading of the accounts at the end of which Abo asked, "Can we pass the accounts, or do you have any questions to ask?"

A Hindu gentleman got up and said, "The accounts have been properly presented every year. I suggest therefore that we pass this now."

Everyone agreed with that.

Three people were selected as trustees to handle the property, and thirteen residents of the monastery were elected to form the governing council.

Before the meeting dispersed, Abo spoke about the plans for reunification. There were so many rumours about it that he decided to set the matter straight, even if it created another controversy. He began by saying, "Even now we are far away from Christ."

The non-Christians were astonished. Bethany had been started to follow Christ, hadn't it been so? And yet the purpose had not been achieved.

"Jesus Christ did not preach principles that contradicted each other. Therefore it is absolutely essential the Churches unite. No one can deny that the Catholic Church is the Body of Christ. No branch which is cut off from the trunk can hope to survive. This is the one thought that has made me eager to reunite."

His words were so beautifully simple that even the non-Christians sat and listened attentively. Then Abo drew his speech to a close with these words, "It is written in the Jacobite Canon that there should be Patriarchs in the four corners of the world, and that the Roman Patriarch be regarded as superior to the others. So then it is absolutely essential that both factions of the Jacobites and the Greek Orthodox and the Armenian Orthodox should unite with the Catholic Church and accept the Roman Patriarch as the Head."

Chapter 32

“You will not establish any more Bethany churches.” This was conveyed to the Metropolitan of Bethany in a letter jointly signed by the Catholicos, Valia Thirumeni Mar Dionysius, and by Metropolitan Mar Gregorios of the Kottayam Diocese.

The immediate reason for this stricture was the creation of the trust and the handing over of the property of Bethany to that trust. That, and his words regarding reunification with the Catholic Church.

Mar Dionysius had that very day written a stern letter to Mar Ivanios telling him that Bethany could no longer be independent. He knew it was the only way he could rein in the Metropolitan.

In reply, Mar Ivanios wrote back, “I can give up the idea of autonomy for Bethany, but on certain conditions. First the Jacobite Church must end all these lawsuits. Secondly, you must in no way get closer to the Jacobite Patriarch. You must keep your identity independent of him.”

There were other conditions also. He wrote the letter and sent it through Advocate John of Elenjikkal, who would hand it over to Mar Dionysius.

This letter made Mar Dionysius even more furious, and he called together a Synod of Bishops to discuss the matter. They all got together and wrote a reply which was then sent to Bethany.

All the residents of the monastery gathered round their spiritual father. Many priests of the Bethany churches had also come with complaints to their leader, and were waiting for a suitable moment.

One other person also had come. Ramban Joseph of Pulikkottil from Kunnamkulam. He and Ramban Philipose of Chepad were great friends. And both were Abo’s beloved students and disciples.

Ramban Joseph had been made a deacon at the tender age of thirteen by his uncle Mar Dionysius of Pulikkottil. His Grace had then brought the young lad to M.D. Seminary and had put him into the care of Panikar Achen. He never forgot the words His Grace had uttered that day. “This boy is a son to me. Please look after him well.” Their relationship from that day onwards had been that of a teacher and his beloved student and had not changed over the years. Now he

had come like a reward for that long tutorship as Ramban Joseph of Pulikkottil.

Abo opened the letter and gave it to Ramban Philipose to read. The Ramban was well aware of the contents of the letter. The two advocates John of Elenjikkal, and Philipose had attended the synod and had informed him personally of all that had taken place there.

The Ramban read the letter aloud to all those who were present. Their faces fell as they heard the strictures against their beloved Abo, but the latter did not seem concerned at all. He sat in his chair gazing into the distance.

The Ramban was furious and gave vent to his anger. "This order forbidding Your Grace to establish churches cannot be justified at all, especially as it is the bounden duty of a Bishop to do so for his flock. As good as telling a priest not to say Mass at all."

"What pains me is the reason given for the ban. Just read aloud those words," said Abo.

The Ramban looked through the letter and found the offending portion. The reason given was that the Bethany churches were disturbing the peace of the people.

"Disturbing the peace of the people!" murmured Abo sadly.

Every time they had met in the past, Mar Dionysius had told Abo that when all the problems in the church were settled, he would come and spend some time in meditation at the monastery on Mundan Mala, so his soul would find peace. And now the same monastery was being publicly decried as a disturbing element.

Ramban Joseph understood his teacher's mental agony and sought to soothe him. "Surely Your Grace will recall the excommunication order sent by Patriarch Abdullah to Mar Dionysius giving no reason at all. Now that order has been repealed and every thing has been smoothened out. This too will go the same way. Please do not take it to heart."

What action should he take now? How should he respond? These thoughts weighed on his mind. Should he obey the order or should he ignore it? If he obeyed it, Bethany would soon be in the hands of others. The independence he had so carefully nurtured would be lost and, his institution would soon pass into the hands of the Patriarchs of Antioch.

And if he ignored it he would be condemned by the public, as

one who had disobeyed his guide and mentor and the Catholicos.

What should he do?

He was immersed in thought when several priests belonging to the monastic order of Bethany came to him to air their woes.

“Valia Thirumeni has written to us,” they began.

“What did His Grace say?” asked Abo arousing himself from his thoughts.

“The Malankara Jacobite Association has called a General Body meeting and wants us to send representatives from each Bethany church to the Old Seminary for the meeting. What should we do, Your Grace?”

Abo was firm in his reply. “So far the Bethany churches have always been independent, and have never sent representatives to any meeting. We shall not start now.”

That infused courage into them. The two Rambans were whispering to each other at the far end of the room while this discussion was going on. Ramban Joseph was ten years younger than Ramban Philipose, nevertheless they were bosom pals. They too were discussing the problems of Bethany.

Abo watched them for a while then interrupted them with a smile. “What are you two discussing so vehemently?”

They stopped their conversation and came up to His Grace. “Mar Dionysius and his friends are making every effort to spoil the fair name of Bethany. We were wondering if we could not do something to stem the tide. Like writing articles, for instance, giving the truth of the matter and having them printed and published.”

“Good idea! But see that you do not hurt anyone’s feelings while doing so.”

Both the Rambans were good writers and began that very day to set matters on record for the public. They wrote about what they felt was the true faith, the great strides Bethany had taken, and the need for reunification.

The articles were written in clear precise language, with the sole aim of allaying the fears and doubts of the public. These articles were put together and brought out in book form with the title, “The Telescope of Malankara.” It was printed in the Bethany press and then distributed to the public. When this was brought to his notice, Mar Dionysius was even more furious and he promptly issued

excommunication orders against the two Rambans.

“You were not consecrated Rambans for Bethany, so please leave the place at once and return to Headquarters, else you will be excommunicated.”

Abo comforted the two Rambans after reading the order. “We are not far from our true goal. Take heart and bear it for the sake of truth.”

Father Alexios had to return from Singapore sooner than expected. He fell ill as soon as he reached the city and when Abo heard of it he ordered him to return at once. Father Alexios came to Thirumoolapuram and met Abo there. “I am so sorry I could not make any collections,” he said sadly.

“But why are you so sad about it?” asked Abo. “After all money does not make much of a difference to us. Our aim is to find the peace of God,” said Abo comfortingly.

Then seeing how weary the priest looked he added, “Don’t go out anywhere to make any collections. Just go to Mundan Mala and get some treatment and rest there.”

“Before I go to Mundan Mala I should like to go to Kottayam,” said Father Alexios.

“Why?”

“I should like to go and see my uncle, Father Alexandros who is ill,” he said.

“Certainly. Please go at once.”

Before he left Abo added a word of caution. “You know of our plans for reunification, don’t you? It will not be long before we are able to achieve that. I shall let you know of the developments later.”

“We are all waiting for that day, Abo. I am ready to join you as soon as you give the word.”

Father Alexios met his aged uncle who was resting in the Old Seminary in Kottayam. As soon as they heard of his arrival several people including Valia Thirumeni went to meet Father Alexios in his room.

Valia Thirumeni asked for news of Bethany. Then he spoke rather disparagingly of the Abo’s intentions to Father Alexios. Somehow they would have to draw the celibate monastic priest on to their side. In the process Valia Thirumeni said, “Achen, you may not have realized it but your Abo is a cheat. He was pampered and nurtured by our

Church, but now he is being ungrateful. He has become our enemy. If you also join the reunification movement you will find yourself between the devil and the deep sea. So be careful.”

Father Alexandreos was listening to all this. He now lifted his thin worn hand and clutched Father Alexios and said in a voice that trembled, “My son, —please —do not leave me in my old age.” The old priest began to weep.

Quite a few other people came to persuade him against such a step. “Even if you reunite with the Catholic Church you will have to suffer much hardship, go around begging for money and food, just as you did earlier. If, on the other hand, you stay within the fold you will have whatever you desire.”

Slowly he changed his mind. His aged uncle’s voice reverberated in his ears like a death bed appeal.

He went back to Mundan Mala but his mind was in turmoil. His recent illness, his long journey overseas, and the latest developments in the church all tended to confuse him and make him dejected. His thoughts were many and varied.

Was it right to leave the Church he was born into and nurtured? That would be an act of ingratitude to the holy fathers who had done so much for him. The Jacobite Church was also an ancient one, then why leave it for another. And even if he did go would anyone have any respect for it? Would they be able to grow? It would be like mixing a spice into the sea. They would simply be lost in it.

All these questions and thoughts clouded his mind and by the time he reached Mundan Mala he was not even thinking clearly. His friends gathered round him inquiring about his health, but his answers were not related to that at all, which really alarmed them.

They wondered what happened to change him so much. But no one dared question him. He was after all the Abuna of the Monastery, appointed by Abo himself.

Father Alexios began his efforts to alienate the residents of the monastery from the Abo. He thought it would be easier to tackle the younger deacons first, but they did not yield.

Then he began to write to the priests of the various Bethany churches and to the nuns in their convents. Every one was alarmed.

The news of his change was soon carried to the Abo residing in Thirumoolapuram by Father Barsleeba of Puramuttom church and

Father Job of Mangalam church. The Abo at once set out for Mundan Mala with Mar Theophilus for company. As soon as he reached the monastery he sent for Father Alexios. "Is it true what I have heard?" he asked.

"What has Your Grace heard?" replied Father Alexios.

"Your question is very like the reply made by Judas Iscariot to Jesus when he said, 'Rabbi, is it I?'"

I understand you have been speaking against reunification. I want to know if it is true or not."

Father Alexios made no response.

"Yes —?"

"I think so, now," stammered the priest.

"What do you think?"

"I think it is wrong to leave the Church and join another one."

"Have I asked you to leave the Church? No. If you are not ready for reunification you do not have to do so. Isn't that enough? Why do you try to prevent those who want to, from leaving?"

Father Alexios did not answer.

"Alright, you can go now," said Abo dismissing him. Father Alexios was out of the room like a shot.

Abo watched him go and then slowly made his way to the chapel where he knelt down and prayed beating his breast in his agony. After that he called his students together and began teaching them again. He spoke about the one Church that could give them salvation.

Father Alexios did not participate in any of the discussions, but stayed away. He had two followers with him.

It was soon a matter of public knowledge that Mar Ivanios and his people were going to join the Catholic Church. Many people rushed to Mundan Mala to meet him. "Your Grace must join the Catholic Church immediately. The Jacobite Church may be against us now, but in time Your Grace will turn out to be their saviour."

Dr. Aloysius Benziger of the Quilon Diocese was also of the same opinion. Mar Ivanios had written to him asking whether it would not be a better idea to wait and assure himself of a larger following than he had now. In reply Dr. Benziger wrote, "It might be better for Your Grace to pull yourself out of the pit first, before pulling the others out."

A few others wrote, "Please do not even think of leaving our

Church, Your Grace.”

He explained his stand to them and it only made them angry. Sometimes they shook their fists at him but to them all he had only his gentle replies which ultimately helped soothe their ruffled feathers.

Chapter 33

Mar Ivanios was waiting for the morrow that would bring him the long awaited permission from Rome to join the Catholic Church. That morrow had not yet come, so they continued praying for it. They prayed to not only St. Teresa, but also to her sister the saintly Mother Augustine, to intercede for them. Surely their prayers were even now, knocking at the doors of Heaven. They were sure the doors of salvation would open for them.

They might have to wait for some more time for the doors to open. However, it was no longer seemly for him to stay on in Mundan Mala, so Abo decided to leave the next morning.

He would travel by boat to Kozhencherry, and from there by bus to Tiruvalla, hoping to rent a house there.

That evening he went into the chapel earlier than usual, and knelt in front of the altar. Mar Theophilus who was sitting in meditation in the chapel knelt by him. Behind them in the nave were all the residents of the monastery. After he had said his prayers he opened his Bible to the Gospel of St. John, chapter ten verse sixteen, and read it aloud. "And I have other sheep that are not of this fold; I must bring them also, they will heed my voice. So there shall be one flock, one shepherd."

The others listened to him and sat meditating on it.

Then Abo began to pray aloud, and finally ended with these words, "Father, You are in me and I in You. I pray that You will let the world know that You have sent me to unite all Your people together."

No one moved when the prayers ended. Everyone sat there waiting to hear what Thirumeni's decisions were. Abo said, "My children, I have to tell you that tomorrow Mar Theophilus and I will be leaving Bethany in the morning. If anyone of you is prepared to join the Catholic Church, you must inform me by midnight tonight. I give you full freedom to decide whether you wish to go or stay here. I will be here in the chapel till midnight."

Then he sat in his chair, a little to the right of the chancel, for meditation. One by one they slowly went up to the chancel and knelt

by his left, and said, "I want to go with you."

Some others knelt in prayer for a long while waiting for some sign as to what were to do, before going up to him and accepting his offer to go with him.

By eleven in the night almost all the residents of the monastery had agreed to join him. Everyone was aware that Alexios Achen and his followers would not go with them. There was however one more person. Deacon Alexander of the Attupurath family had not yet given his consent.

Abo understood. He was not easily shaken but this upset him greatly. He just could not bear it. He had loved this disciple so very greatly. The deacon had worked with him in all his projects sweating blood to make Bethany what it was. Why hadn't he come?

Abo kept looking at his watch. He had decided that he would not stay a minute longer than the time he had given. He would wait until midnight and no more. His heart ached with unshed tears as his lips moved silently in prayer. Gradually his voice rose and he was soon beating his breast in agony.

It was almost twelve o'clock. Just fifteen seconds to go, when the deacon entered the chapel. It was as if he had come because of some divine intervention. He ran into the chapel and fell at Abo's feet, begging forgiveness for being so late. Then he told Abo that he was willing to join the Catholic Church.

No one felt sleepy, so they all stayed awake in the chapel watching the night pass away and the dawn appear. The birds in the forest began their early morning chatter, and silver began to streak the dark night clouds. The sun was rising.

Abo came out of his meditation. He looked at his disciples and said, "We will leave here in the morning. I want you to be ready to leave within an hour. You may take with you only that which you absolutely need, nothing else. Leave everything else behind."

The disciples went about their morning ablutions and made haste to leave. They donned their saffron robes, their waist bands, and the wooden cross around their necks and lined up in front of Abo. Even the orphans were ready to leave wearing saffron and clutching a small bundle of exactly two changes of clothing, just like their elders.

It was Barsleebea Achen who cleared out Abo's cell. He looked curiously at the foot of Abo's bed. There was something all rolled

up, with protective covering on the bed. He wondered what it was and opened it to find a new cotton mattress, obviously unused, rolled up and placed out of way at the foot of the bed. Some admirer had given it as a present to Abo years ago for his personal use. But Abo had never used it. The priest bundled it back and left it as he found it. He had been given strict instructions to pack only those books as were absolutely necessary, and he had done so. He packed the books into a small bundle and left the cell with it.

Abo then asked everyone to go to the chapel for their last prayer in Bethany. He prostrated himself before the altar as he prayed. "It has taken me eleven long years to come to Your Light, O Lord."

He felt as if his heart were being cut out. His lips trembled and his tears flowed as he turned to his disciples and said, "You may rise now."

Every one sprang up to obey their master. They could not control their feelings. Even Abo's voice broke as he said, "My children, we came here empty handed. Now we are leaving empty-handed."

Just then a couple of orphan children ran into the chapel. "Father, Abuna is very ill. He is lying on his bed and it looks as if he is in great pain." Their faces showed their grief and shock.

Everybody ran to Alexios Achen's cell. He was lying on his bed and writhing as if in pain.

"He was alright a little while ago," someone said.

His eyes were rolling, and he seemed to be fighting for his life. With difficulty he said, "Water— a little water."

The cook hurried in with some water and slowly dropped a few drops on his tongue. Then he splashed some water on his face. Some others rubbed his hands and feet. The children found a fan and fanned him. Alexios Achen did not seem to be aware of anything, but rolled about in agony.

Abo shut his eyes and prayed silently. Then putting his hand on Alexios Achen's head, he called out to him tenderly. At once Alexios Achen calmed down and stopped groaning. He opened his eyes and looked around him and tried to get up. But Abo prevented that. "Lie down. You need rest," he said.

Then turning to Joshua Achen he said, "You stay here with Alexios Achen for a while."

Joshua Achen had been all set to go with Abo and was sad-

dened by this request. However he could not but obey. It is possible that Joshua Achen began to pray that minute that Alexios Achen would recover soon.

Abo bid Alexios Achen goodbye. He took off his watch and gave it to Alexios Achen. "There, that's my last gift to you."

Alexios Achen received the gift and held it close to his chest. He wanted to say something but the words would not come out.

The sun was just rising in the east when Mar Ivanios decided it was time to leave. All of them, leader and followers, took a last look around what had been their home for eleven long years. They looked at the rubber trees and the vegetable garden, the land they had tilled for so long so arduously, and their eyes filled with tears at the parting. The mango trees they had planted would blossom in another couple of years. At least a few of their companions would be there to enjoy its fruit. Abo called out to the cook and asked him to take good care of his favourite cow, his horse, and his dog, Tiger.

They slowly walked down the steep slope of Mundan Mala. Abo went ahead, followed by Mar Theophilus, followed by the priests, deacons, and orphans. It was rather reminiscent of the exodus of the Israelites under the leadership of Moses and Aaron from Egypt to the Promised Land.

Not everyone was as nimble as Abo. Poor Father Stephen was a consumptive and could not keep pace with the others, and lagged behind, coughing, so one of the more able took his bundle and carried it for him. But he too pushed forward eager to go with Abo.

The local people had heard of their departure and had lined the tortuous path down the hill, to see them go. Most of them were generally employed to till the Bethany land and so had worked alongside with the residents of the monastery. They looked sadly at their Abo and bade him goodbye.

As they went down, Sadhu Younan asked, "Abo where are we going?"

Quite a few of them would have liked to have asked the same question. They did not know where they were going. Abo had called and they had obeyed. Abo replied, "Do not worry, son, God will show us the way."

"Had some propaganda been done, there might have been a larger crowd accompanying us," said Sadhu Aprem sadly.

Many of them echoed the thought. They were leaving the Jacobite Church, which they had worked for so assiduously, loved more than life, for the Catholic Church. But the numbers were so few. Many had gone over to the Catholic Church before, and had been absorbed into it without trace. Perhaps this exodus also would go equally unnoticed.

Abo's reply to Sadhu Aprem was directed at everyone. "We do not need such propaganda. Those who sow in tears will reap in laughter."

When they reached the bottom of the hill Abo turned back for a sweeping glance from top to bottom of this hill which had housed them for so long. The long rays of the early morning sun stole through the spreading branches as if reaching out to them. The past eleven years went through his mind in a flash, and tears ran down his face as he bade a final goodbye.

A boat awaited them at Maduthummoozhi. Here too, many had gathered to bid the ascetic priests, goodbye. One by one they got into the boat. The last one to get in was Abo. The tears rolled down the faces of the villagers. These priests had come to them with medicines and food when they were ill, but now they were leaving. When would they see them again?

The boatman lifted his long pole and gently lowered it into the water urging the boat away from the banks. Slowly they moved down the Kakkat River.

It looked as if a reception had been arranged for them at the boat jetty in Vadasserikara. There was a large covered boat anchored in the jetty, and a larger crowd in the quay. As their boat neared the jetty someone came forward, smiling a welcome.

"Are you coming, too, Mani?" asked Abo.

Mani of the Panachamoottil family was a close friend. He said, "If it please Your Grace, please cross over to this covered boat. Your Grace will be able to travel in comfort even if it rains."

Very sensible thought the Bishop as he agreed. It was the monsoon season after all. Mani gave them a sumptuous breakfast before they set out again, arriving in Ranni in the afternoon. As they approached the boat jetty there, Father Barskeepa, formerly a teacher named Oommen of Sooranad said, "Will you be able to get room for so many of us to stay in Tiruvalla, Abo? Moreover, there are not

many there who approve of our decision. Food will also be a problem.”

“What else can you suggest, Father?”

“I suggest we go to Vennikulam. There are schools and churches there, and even the non-Christians are friendly towards us.”

“Then let us go there.”

They got off the boat in Ranni and decided to travel by bus to Vennikulam. There was one rickety bus going to Vennikulam that day, and that luckily chugged in shortly after. They stood holding on to the bars in the bus and were jolted into Vennikulam by evening. Everyone was tired, particularly the orphan children and the sickly Father Stephen.

They got off at the Memala School in Vennikulam where they put together the available benches and slept on them. Those who were younger and more able slept on the bare floor.

Next morning everyone knew that Mar Ivanios of Bethany had left Mundan Mala and was now staying in Vennikulam. It was front page news and people rushed to the school to meet Abo and his followers.

Someone came forward and said, “Thirumeni, you and your people can not stay in this school. It is much too uncomfortable. Please come and stay in my house.”

“Can you put up twenty-five of us in your house?” asked Abo, curiously.

“I shall vacate my house for Your Grace. All Your Grace’s followers can stay there. I have a smaller house which is more than sufficient for me and my family.”

Everyone was astonished. Abo called him near. “What is your name?” he asked.

“I am known as Kutty of Kanjirathummood, Your Grace.”

“May God reward you for your generosity,” said Abo smiling.

Chapter 34

“No one should help the Bethany people anymore.”

That was the reaction from Valia Thirumeni Vattasseril Geevarghese Mar Dionysius. More than the fury that inspired the order, there was perhaps fear behind it. With the departure of Mar Ivanios of Bethany and his followers from Mundan Mala and the rumour that they would shortly join the Catholic Church there was a fear that a sizable portion of his own people would leave the Mother Church and cross over to the Catholics.

That was what prompted this slap in the face of his beloved student. The order, which was read in every church, was that no one should help Bethany even in his private capacity. The people were much too afraid to disobey the order.

The disciples could not collect even the piggy banks they had distributed earlier. They had no savings whatsoever. There was simply nothing, not even one meal a day. The only thing they had in plenty was water in the well. No matter how much they drank, it could not stave off the pangs of hunger. They had become very weak, but hope still shone in their faces. Thirumeni was more worried about the orphans in his care. How long could they go hungry! He sent them collecting the edible leaves of wild cassia which were then cooked with coconut and chilly. It helped to stave off hunger pangs.

Abo comforted them. “We have to suffer much to achieve our goal. We may have to suffer a lot of starvation on this account. Valia Thirumeni has shut all doors in my face so you will have to suffer with me.”

His disciples were in no way upset. They only offered complete support to the Bishop.

“We have come out of Bethany and wish to live in your shadow. We can survive somehow, but we feel sorry for the nuns in the convent. They cannot go outside their convent walls, so you will have to make some provision for them.”

Even while he tarried at Vennikulam his thoughts were with the nuns in Thirumoolapuram. They never revealed any of their sufferings to anyone. He would have to make some provision for them. It

was good that Mother Edith was with the nuns. Nevertheless, Abo went to Thirumoolapuram and met them there.

Both Mother Edith and Mother Helen came out to meet him. They still had the same serene smile on their faces. "Has Your Grace heard from Rome yet?" asked Mother Edith.

"No, but I am very sure I shall soon hear from them," answered Abo confidently.

"I have often spoken to the girls about reunification with the Catholic Church. I have asked them to follow in Your Grace's footsteps."

"I do not insist on anyone following me, Mother. I am very certain that I am doing the right thing, so I hope and pray others will follow me."

"As far as the nuns are concerned they are ready to follow Your Grace. They are all prepared to become Catholics."

"Where are they?" he asked with a beaming smile.

Sister Helen went in to call them.

"So we shall be together in Heaven, shan't we?" said Mother Edith.

He looked into her innocent light green eyes as he said, "If it had not been for you I would have had to be satisfied with the creation of the Bethany Order for men. A thousand thanks to God for His kindness."

Mother Shaina came out. She had become Mother Superior of the convent about five years ago. She was followed by the others.

"The families of many of our nuns are against the idea of reunification. However, no matter what they say we shall come out and follow Your Grace," said Mother Shaina.

"See! Everything is happening as Your Grace wanted it to be," said Mother Edith. "These nuns can now carry out all the work by themselves. So Sister Helen and I should like to leave and go back to our convent."

A feeling of sadness spread over everyone. They could not bear the thought of Mother Edith leaving them. How could they? Mother Edith and Sister Helen had been with them for fifteen long years. After the convent had been established they had gone back to Calcutta, but had kept track of their work and had returned every year for a visit and to make keen inquiries regarding their work.

“But Mother, you have been with us for so long and have shared our hopes and fears. Why not wait and see it completed?” Abo asked. Mother Edith accepted the invitation.

Abo thought about Mother Edith’s loving nature and all the work she had done. He turned to the Bethany sisters and said, “You should always remember the example she has set you. I sometimes cannot help wishing I had had someone like her to train me when I was young. Had that been so I might have achieved much more than this.”

He was always ready to appreciate the good in others, even if it meant slighting himself. The nuns looked from Abo to Mother. To them both were exemplary people.

Mother Edith’s face shone. Her love for them showed in her sparkling eyes. But Abo’s face was fiery. Like the sun. One could not look at his burning eyes. His stern face with the thick dark beard were indeed intimidating. His voice was deep and rough. And his tone was always imperious. And yet behind all this one could not forget his purity, his humility, his love and his willingness to sacrifice himself. No, they could never be forgotten.

“My Children— we will have to face many problems. You will have heard of the ban that Valia Thirumeni has laid on the people. Nor can we expect anything from the Catholic Church as we have not yet joined them. But do not worry, I shall send with Yacob whatever I can get.” His voice was both stern and sad.

“No, Your Grace. Give whatever Your Grace gets to the priests. They have to go out and work. We are sitting inside the convent. It does not matter if we go hungry.”

He was touched by their willingness to starve if necessary. They were prepared to sacrifice everything for the sake of their goal. He praised and thanked God for the loyalty they showed. Even in his troubles he found his students giving him strength with their support.

He went once again to Thirumoolapuram as there was yet a lot of work to be completed. But he had a big surprise when he reached there. Valia Thirumeni was there. He wondered if he had come there to take him to task for his change of heart.

Abo was prepared for any kind of humiliation. After all it was his beloved teacher and it was in a good cause.

He imbibed courage from his firm belief that he was doing God’s Will. All the same he wanted to soothe his teacher’s ruffled feelings.

What could he say that would help? He first went into the chapel and prayed God would give him the right words.

He came out of the chapel and went straight to meet Valia Thirumeni and fell at his feet. "I am aware Your Grace, that I have put myself beyond the pale," he cried in a voice that sounded as rough as the splitting of bamboo.

With a grunt Mar Dionysius moved away and stood at a distance. His student's distress did not seem to affect him much, but then his student was as stubborn as his master.

"If I am not allowed to kiss your feet, may I at least kiss your hands?" he said, and getting up he went over to Valia Thirumeni and caught his hands and kissed them several times. "Please forgive me if I have hurt Your Grace in any way. Please bless me. What should I do? Obey the voice of God or do what man tells me. It is for Your Grace to decide."

That did not however melt Valia Thirumeni's heart.

"Your Grace is much affected by what the world will say. Not by what God wants. Your Grace must give up that attitude."

"I will carry out my duties as best as I know how to," Mar Dionysius said gruffly.

"What duties? What God has entrusted Your Grace or what has been entrusted by man?"

That question was ignored as he answered. "Are you planning to take my people away to Rome?" he said harshly.

"They are God's creatures. Please do not say they are yours!"

"Why have you left Bethany?"

"Your Grace is my father, my teacher, my guide. Let there be no haggling between us. I do not want to stay in Bethany and argue over its possession. I spent a lot of thinking over this, and I felt it was God's intention that I leave Bethany. And that is what I have done. I have returned Bethany to Your Grace."

By this time Valia Thirumeni's people had gathered round. One of them said, "Isn't it better to withdraw the harsh order against him, Your Grace?"

Mar Dionysius merely made his usual gesture, that of slitting his throat, in reply to this plea. Nothing was going to make him change his mind. Abo's heart nearly broke. Without saying another word he turned and left weeping.

Chapter 35

Finally Rome gave him the green signal. He was granted whatever he had asked for, and the matter was conveyed to him through the Pope's representative in India.

He was allowed to say Mass using the very beautiful prayers of the Jacobite church and follow all its rituals. For five years he had worked hard for this wonderful news.

Rome had also been very busy all these years. They had had to satisfy themselves about the sanctity of all the observances in the Jacobite Church and see whether it was acceptable to them or not. They had to go into the personal history of the Bishops of Bethany — from their baptism to their consecration as bishops — to see whether it satisfied the conditions laid down by Rome. Bishop Benziger of Quilon had been entrusted with the task of examining all their credentials.

It was necessary to examine closely the prayers and rituals of the Jacobite Church, which were to be used in their churches after reunification and Bishop Kalasserry of Changanacherry was entrusted with this work. Both of them after a careful study wrote to Rome that all was well and perfectly acceptable. Bishop Benziger was also entrusted with all the rituals connected with bringing these people into the fold.

Mar Ivanios felt very much like the captain of a ship that had sailed many stormy seas before coming into a port. The relief and happiness his friends felt knew no bounds when the news of this reached Bethany.

They were leaving the Church they had been born and bred in, and were joining the Catholic Church. Not privately but as a whole group. They would be part of the Catholic Church but they would observe all the rituals of their mother Church. A Church with new rites. In the two thousand-year-old Catholic Church there were eighteen groups with different rites. Now there would be nineteen. But still much would have to be done before the reunification could take place.

A date would have to be fixed for that. A really suitable date.

And then it struck Abo that the Feast of Our Lady's Nativity was approaching. The twenty-first September which was his own birthday. What better date could there be for beginning a new life? He would be forty-nine that day.

He would begin that day by saying Mass as a Syrian Catholic. Before that he would have to go to Quilon and sit in meditation there. He decided he would join the new Church on the twentieth and he would take Mar Theophilus with him.

Before leaving for Quilon Abo went and met the European nuns and told them of his decision. They were delighted. They were extremely happy that the nuns they had trained would be joining the Catholic Church, too.

In fact, they had postponed their departure, just so they would know what decision Rome had taken. With a feeling of having completed a piece of work, Mother Edith and Sister Helen and Miss Brooke-Smith met Mar Ivanios. Now they could take their leave of him. Who would broach the subject, however?

"May we take our leave of Your Grace, now?" There was intolerable pain in their faces and their voices.

Mar Ivanios did not know what to say. He stood looking into the distance lost in thought and his eyes brimmed over with tears. His lips trembled as he tried to speak. The Syrian Christian nuns came out to meet their guide. This was a moment they dreaded. To say goodbye to the ladies who had sacrificed a whole segment of their lives for Bethany was not to be thought of. Their thoughts flew back to their early days and their eyes filled with tears.

Every day when the Oxford nuns met for prayers they would sing hymns and one of them would accompany them on the harmonium. They brought the harmonium out and gave it to the Syrian Christian nuns and said, "Keep this in remembrance of us. We have only this to give."

Mar Ivanios broke his silence. "As long as these girls are here we will always remember you. You took these lumps of coal and turned them into burning coals of fire. Thank you, Mother. Thank you a thousand times. Thank you Sister Helen and thank you Miss Brooke-Smith."

A couple of days before the twentieth, Thampi the driver, came in the Melamparambil car to take them to Quilon. Mar Ivanios and

Mar Theophilus got in. Whenever he travelled any distance he was always accompanied by a priest and a deacon. He did not break that convention today, either.

Father John had been ordained a priest just ten days ago. Thirumeni had asked him and Deacon Alexander to go with them to Quilon. Both of them had come to Thirumoolapuram from Vennikulam on some errand. So they also got into the car.

As the car slowly moved forward someone called out from behind. Someone came running up from behind, clapping his hands shouting to them to stop.

“Stop the car,” Thirumeni ordered and looked round to see who it was. It was Kilileth Chacko, his former manager.

“What’s the matter?” asked Thirumeni leaning out of the car.

Chackochen came up quite out of breath. “Your Grace, why didn’t you ask me to go with you? I want to be there when Your Grace joins the Catholic Church. Your Grace must grant me permission to go with you.”

“But there is no room in the car, Chacko.”

“That does not matter. If need be, I shall curl up in the boot of the car. But I insist on going with Your Grace.”

“Get in then,” said Mar Ivanios and opened the door.

Chackochen squeezed in somehow and said, “I will go with Your Grace, even if Your Grace is going to hell.”

“What!” exploded Thirumeni. The others looked at him curiously.

Chackochen laughed as he said, “I did not mean that. I know Your Grace will not go to hell.”

They were going by way of Nangiarkulangara as Thirumeni wanted to meet Ramban Philipose who had acquired some land hoping to start a primary school there. He was in sole charge there.

By the time they reached the place it was raining heavily. That did not prevent Mar Ivanios from getting out of the car. He was pretty drenched by the time he reached the door, and explained to the Ramban what he was doing.

“I think it is more advisable for Your Grace to join the Catholic Church and then convert Ramban Pulikkottil and me,” he said.

Ramban Joseph Pulikkottil was in Tiruvalla. Yes, he could return

to Tiruvalla and then ask the two of them to join him. Without waiting for the rain to stop, they set out again.

He spent two days praying and fasting. The days of darkness were drawing to a close and he was waiting for a new day to dawn. It dawned finally, Saturday, the twentieth of September, Nineteen-hundred and Thirty.

Mar Ivanios and Mar Theophilus reached Quilon in the afternoon and they went straight to the chapel where Dr. Benziger was awaiting them. They knelt in front of him, and after the special prayers had been said, they were declared to have joined the Catholic Church. The clock struck the hour. It was exactly half-past three in the afternoon.

As they sat drinking tea with Dr. Benziger, the latter said, "What happened today must be the most unusual and important happening in the history of the Church in this century. I am going to have this recorded on marble and fixed on the wall of the church here."

After tea, Mar Ivanios suggested a stroll on the beach.

Perhaps he wished for a quiet spell after his arduous work. It was the first time in years that he had had such a moment to spare. Or perhaps he wanted time to think of new plans. Whatever it was they all agreed and strolled down to the beach a few yards away. They lifted their faces to the wind as it blew against them, feeling perhaps that it was blowing away all the past. Suddenly Mar Ivanios stopped.

A new thought was taking shape in his mind. He had to stop and think it through. Right now only two of them had joined the Catholic Church. The others were to join later. But, he thought, suppose they joined today itself. Three people had accompanied him. A priest and a deacon and a layman. If these three also joined today they would have every component of the new Church. An Archbishop, a Bishop, a priest, a deacon and a layman.

At once he conveyed this thought to Dr. Benziger. "Very Good. It is a good thing that God put the thought into your mind today itself. Why don't you do the honours?" suggested Dr. Benziger.

"No. It is better you conduct this yourself Dr. Benziger. I would like you to do this for us," insisted Mar Ivanios.

Dr. Benziger did not make any more objections, so they all walked over to the church. Father John and Deacon Alexander and Kilileth Chacko knelt in front of Dr. Benziger, and he said the prayers

and gathered them into the Catholic Church.

Journalists wasted no time in searching out these five people who became the nucleus of the new Church. Many doubts were raised but Mar Ivanios in his usual way fielded all questions.

The next day was the twenty-first of September, when the Jacobites celebrated the feast of the birthday of the blessed Virgin. The Jacobite Church followed the Julian calendar, so there was a difference of thirteen days between the feasts celebrated in the Jacobite Church and the Catholic Church which followed the Gregorian calendar. The Catholics celebrated the birthday of the Blessed Virgin on the eighth of September, and the Jacobites on the twenty-first. Until yesterday he had been a Jacobite and had celebrated the feast on the twenty-first. For the rest of his life, this date would always mean something special to him.

Next morning he celebrated Mass. Dr. Benziger was stunned to hear the whole service in Malayalam. He was at once suspicious and decided he would inform Rome about it. The new group was supposed to follow the Syrian rituals and consequently use Syriac, but here was Mar Ivanios saying Mass in Malayalam.

It was the beginning of the second most important period of his life. Celebrating that Mass had given him a strength he had not had before. After the Mass he would go straight to Mavelikara and convert his parents into Roman Catholics.

He did as planned and took his parents to the Bethany Church in Mavelikara. On the way he recalled his childhood when he used to clutch his mother's hand as she walked to church. They used to pass by a catholic church and he recalled his mother saying, "That is the real Church."

He had been searching for the truth since those days and had finally found it. As he helped his aged parents into the church, his father suddenly stopped and said, "Most of our relatives are all ready to join the Catholic Church. However, there are many against it, too. They have threatened to have the pension which our Maharajah gives us stopped, in the event of our joining the Catholic Church."

"The Catholic Church is like a field that has treasure hidden under it. It is ours for the taking after abandoning all that we had before. If the Maharajah does not give us a pension, it does not matter. What is it compared to the reward that the King of Kings will

give us?"

The old couple knelt in front of the candle-lit altar. Mar Ivanios came out of the chancel in his robes and said the prayers which would make his parents Catholics. As they came out of the church, journalists from the different papers crowded about them. They were dumbstruck by the sight of a Catholic Bishop wearing saffron robes. This must be the very first Bishop in that Church to be so dressed. Not even Patriarch Rahmani had worn saffron when he joined the Catholic Church.

After the service was over Mar Ivanios knelt in front of his parents and said, "Now you must bless me."

Everyone stood staring at the little ceremony. The aged parents placed their trembling hands on his head and prayed silently, while photographers recorded the event for posterity.

Mar Ivanios and his party soon returned to Thirumoolapuram. The two Rambans were waiting there to be reunited to the Church.

From there they proceeded to the convent. Apart from the European nuns there were thirteen Syrian nuns. "I do not insist that any of you follow me," said Mar Ivanios. "However those who are willing to do so should go to the chapel at once. I shall be waiting for you there."

"We are all ready to join the Catholic Church," said Mother Shaina. Her response made his eyes sparkle. All of them went straight-away to the chapel where Mar Ivanios performed the necessary ceremony to make them Catholics.

They then made their way to the monastery where two guests awaited him. Mar James Kalasserry and Bishop Choolapparambil of Kottayam. But even as their welcoming words filled his heart, he was saddened by the thought of the European nuns who had departed. He accepted their gifts and invited them to the reception that was to follow.

He received many good wishes on his new state, but the one he valued most was the brief message from Pope Pius XI—"Welcome. A big welcome." How could he even hope to explain to others what that message meant to him!

By this time the world was aware of his conversion to Catholicism. It was big news in every paper and it was splashed on the front pages along with his picture. An American paper said, "This is the

most important event that has taken place in the Roman Catholic Church in the twentieth century.”

Well-known papers hailed him as the Indian Newman.

Eighty-five years ago Henry Newman had shaken all England by joining the Catholic Church. Newman was a Fellow in Oriel and he with like thinkers began the Oxford Movement. They had an aim. Henry VIII had crushed the Roman Catholic Church in England in the sixteenth century and had introduced the Protestant faith. The Oxford Movement was started to undo some of the damage done to the Church.

Now here in India the same thing had happened. Mar Ivanios was hailed as the Indian Newman. Congratulatory letters began arriving from everywhere and soon there was no room to keep them all. Journalists followed him wherever he went. He was getting tired of all the questions, for not all of them were pleasant. He answered them all gently and clearly.

He had to attend many receptions both in and out of the state. A grand reception was hosted by Mar Kalaserry in Changanacherry where he in his presidential address said, “We extend a hearty welcome to this Bishop who has reunited with our Church. We welcome him and his people who have joined us. And we have to give them a concrete welcome by giving them all the help we can. And they in their turn must give us the help we need. I pray that this small beginning will grow and spread. Each one of us should do his best to help this movement. Our priests and nuns and all those who hope to join the clergy should help as much as they can.”

He ended his speech by handing over a small packet containing a thousand rupees to Mar Ivanios. Then Mar Ivanios got up to speak. He began with a smile as he said, “We shall do what the good Bishop said. We shall love each other and help each other. After all what you have is ours and what we have is yours.”

Everybody burst out laughing. Mar Kalasserry looked abashed as he shook his head as if to deny what he had said. But the audience kept clapping and applauding.

Chapter 36

All those who had hoped that Mar Ivanios and his people would suffer hardships for deserting the mother Church had to admit defeat. Vattasseril Mar Dionysius had forbidden his people to offer any help to the dissidents, but that did not make them starve. There were still people willing to help Bethany. There were even Jacobite priests sending cartloads of rice and money to the Bethany monastery in Vennikulam.

One day a Hindu gentleman, Narayana Vaidyan from an upper class family in Pullad came to see the Bishop. He was shocked by the poverty he saw in the monastery, and promised to send all the help he could. Moreover he wanted them to stay in Vennikulam

He bought four and a half acres of land there on a hill and handed the land over to the Bishop. A new monastery, built on the lines of the one on Mundan Mala, came up there, the only difference being that the new one was thatched with matted palm leaves and not grass as was used in Perunad. There were different buildings for the monks, the guests who came there, and for those who came for help. A small stream flowing past was very convenient for them.

They had their teething troubles, but they were growing strong. That alarmed Mar Dionysius and his followers. How to nip all this in the bud was their concern.

Well known orators would be the best weapons and soon a large number went out speaking against the Bishop. Books also came out mocking the Bishop and his movement. One of the writers had no compunctions about using foul language to laugh at even the nuns in their convent. Perhaps he was afraid of being cursed for he published it under a pseudonym. "A wolf in sheep's clothing has come out of the forests of Bethany to swallow up all our innocent young lambs," he shrieked in his book. A friend of Mar Ivanios, however, brought out a book to deflate the interest roused by this book.

So did the two Rambans, Joseph Pulikkottil and Philipose of Cheppad who were not going to take the insult lying down. They came out with a book in chaste language spelling out the reasons

that prompted them to join the Catholic Church. It was a proclamation of their faith and the book had to be brought out repeatedly to satisfy public demand.”

Those who believed that the new Catholics would dwindle and die by these poisoned arrows, suffered a setback. This only increased their ire and they looked for ways and means to crucify the new group. Public ridicule would be a good weapon they felt.

But Mar Ivanios had his admirers too. He was invited by the royal family in Mavelikara to a reception in the palace and he set out as usual in the Melamparambil car. He was leaning back in the back seat thinking over what he was going to say when the driver Thampi interrupted his thoughts. “Would Your Grace object if I took a route different from the usual?” he asked.

“Hmmn! Why?”

“On my way here I saw an unusual sight,” said the driver.

That roused the Bishop from his thoughts and he looked at the driver questioningly.

“I saw some ruffians carrying a coffin and ringing the death knell on the road,” said the driver.

“Why should that worry us?” asked Mar Ivanios.

The driver hesitated to describe the rest. He might be a Muslim but he revered the Bishop.

“Come on. Speak up, man,” ordered the Bishop.

“They had a plantain stem inside the coffin. On the lid of the coffin they had used lime to write Your Grace’s name in large letters,—the rascals,” said Thampi, wrathfully.

“Very well, take whichever route you think is better,” said the Bishop

As he drove along he said, “Yesterday some people tried to beat me up.”

“Why?”

“Because I turned down the five hundred rupees they offered me—.”

“Now that’s a loss,” commented Mar Ivanios. “If you did not want the money you could have given it to Bethany. But what did they want you to do?”

“They wanted me to send the car crashing down some steep hill on one of our trips. They would give me the money afterwards. I told

them I would not do it even if they were to offer me fifty thousand. That's when they tried to beat me."

Mar Ivanios laughed. "For shame!" he said. "Do they value my life so little? Just five hundred rupees!"

He was given many receptions and everywhere he was given valuable gifts. At one reception he was given a gold chain. On the way he felt extremely tired and wanted to rest. He went up to his room and put the chain on his table before lying down on his bed for a short nap. There was a knock on the door and a man entered. "Will Your Grace permit me to look at the chain given to you today?" he asked.

Without rousing himself Mar Ivanios answered sleepily. "There it is on the table," he said as he drifted off to sleep. He slept deeply and soundly, but woke up at the time he had intended to. There was no chain on the table.

That was strange, he thought. He wondered if it had been put away safely some place and looked everywhere for it. Then suddenly he recalled the stranger and his strange request. Had he made off with it? He did not look the type though, he thought recalling his face and the incident. He decided to keep the matter a secret.

He had other engagements and he went out again and was able to return only on the following day. As they came to the place where the ruffians had paraded a coffin he looked around. The place was calm and yet there were groups of people standing around. They all looked gloomy and when they saw him they folded their palms together in solemn greeting. Perhaps their gloomy faces struck him as odd, for he asked the driver to stop the car.

"I think these people have something to say to me," he said.

As soon as the car stopped the people came crowding round. "Please Your Grace," they said, bowing low. "Please do not curse this village," they pleaded. "God has given him the punishment he deserved."

"We do not know what you are saying. Come on speak up clearly."

"Does Your Grace know what a group of rowdies were up to, yesterday? They had rung the death knell to call people together."

"Yes, so we had heard."

"Well, their leader died yesterday."

“How?” asked Thampi in surprise.

“They waited on the road for Your Grace, for a long time. When Your Grace did not come they went to the nearest bar and had a few drinks. A quarrel broke out and someone pulled out a knife and stabbed the leader. He died on the spot.”

“And then ?” asked Thampi breathlessly.

“The postmortem was done this morning and this afternoon the body was buried in the very coffin they used yesterday. The funeral was over just a while ago.”

“What about his family?” the Bishop asked.

“He leaves a wife and two children,” they replied.

“Where do they live?”

They gave him the necessary directions and the Bishop went on his way. But he never forgot and in fact frequently thought of the plight of that small family, and wondered what he could do to comfort them.

He could not visit the family that day, but they remained in his mind. A day came when he was in that area again and he suddenly decided to go and visit them. He had accepted an urgent invitation to the Church in Kumbazha. Many there wished to join the Catholic Church and had invited him to perform the rites. On the way he suddenly asked the driver to turn into a narrow lane. Thampi went as far as he could, then stopped. Strangely, he had stopped right in front of the house he was looking for. A small hut. When Thampi sounded the horn a poor woman came out followed by two small children. The Bishop called them over. He offered them words of comfort and then dug into his pockets and pulled out a small packet of money he had set aside for them. Her lips trembled as she accepted the money. It was clear from her expression that she had not encountered such magnanimity before.

From there they went to Kumbazha via Kaipattoor. His enemies had heard of his plans and had gathered near the boat jetty in Kaipattoor. There was no bridge across the river. He would have to get out of the car and the car would then be driven on to a raft and rowed across. They planned to humiliate him there, so they gathered a small crowd of children and gave them black flags with the necessary instructions.

“The Bishop’s car will come any minute now. When it comes

wave your flags and call out, 'Disaster has come upon us——Disaster has come upon us.'"

The children practised waving the flags and shouting the slogans a few times until they were perfect and then waited. The oarsman had been told not to come to this side but moor the raft on the opposite shore. The man was frightened and had stayed out of sight. Before long there was the sound of an approaching car and as it came nearer the children waved their black flags and shouted the slogans they had been taught.

The car stopped and the door opened. A tall well built, suited and booted man got out brandishing a cane. The children were frightened and ran away and the elders tried to escape. The man lashed out with his cane striking whoever happened to be in striking range. He was trembling with rage and he stood there challenging everyone. Not for nothing was he called Tiger Subrahmaniam. He happened to be the top man in the police department of the district and was not the kind to take an insult lying down.

The enemies awaiting the arrival of the Bishop had not been aware of the Police chief's journey that day. But the Bishop's car arrived almost immediately after and stopped at the boat jetty. Mar Ivanios got out smiling a greeting at the Police Officer whose fury died down at once. He came up to the Bishop greeted him and ruefully told him all that happened. Both had a hearty laugh. Then he himself called out to the boatman and told him to come over.

The raft came up and Chief Subrahmaniam called Thampi. "Drive the Bishop's car up," he ordered.

"You were here before me," said Mar Ivanios. "So you go ahead first."

"Your Grace's time is more valuable than mine," said the Police Chief. "I only look after people's worldly welfare. But Your Grace looks after the welfare of so many souls. So I shall wait for Your Grace to cross over first."

God had indeed held him in His arms that day. It was his deep abiding faith in his Saviour that kept him safe at all times.

Mar Ivanios went all over central Travancore and many people joined the new Catholic Church. After much journeying he finally reached the monastery in Vennikulam. The residents there had much cause for complaint.

“The Jacobites are assaulting and abusing those who join the Catholic Church, Your Grace.”

“What happened?”

“One of our members was having his hair cut when a group of Jacobites came and drove away the barber. They humiliated our member with his hair half cut and then warned the barbers not to have anything more to do with us. We had to get another barber from elsewhere to finish cutting that poor chap’s hair.”

“Poor man. Had I heard of it I would have gone and cut his hair for him,” said Mar Ivanios. It was his principle that each man should be self-sufficient as far as possible and he had taught his disciples that. How often had he demonstrated his skill with a barber’s razor to drive home his point to the disciples! He had no qualms about demonstrating his skill once again.

“And now tell me about Father Stephen,” he asked the disciples.

They all looked suddenly sad. “There is no hope,” said Father Job who was the physician in the monastery. “I have tried all my medicines but nothing seems to affect him. He has no hunger, and he is growing weak.”

Mar Ivanios went straight to Father Stephen’s room. His state was pitiable. He was so weak he could not even move. The Bishop suddenly remembered him as he had been when he joined. How cheerfully had the sprightly man gone about the arduous duties of the monastery! How he had gone about collecting the *pidi-ari*. He was the one who took all the collection tins to each home and then later collected them. Now he was dying. He would cough occasionally and spit out the blood stained phlegm into the spittoon. But he never failed to lift his weak voice in prayer for Bethany, for the residents there, and for the reunification plans.

The tired old man took Mar Ivanios’ hand in his and said, “I am ready to die, Your Grace. But I want to become a Catholic first. I am so glad Your Grace arrived to accept me into the fold.”

They took turns to sit by him. Father Job seldom left his side, but it was in vain. Day by day he grew weaker, as the terrible disease spread within him. Then after a bout of heavy coughing he stopped breathing. It was the first death in Bethany.

St. Stephen was the first Christian martyr in the New Testament. And here in Bethany after a lot of suffering Father Stephen

was the first to die among the folk of Bethany and among the new Catholics. It was Mar Ivanios himself who conducted the last rites for his beloved Father Stephen and consigned him to the dust, "Dust thou art and to dust thou shall return."

Chapter 37

He never expected such a grand reception in Goa. But it was not the large crowds or the compliments and gifts that he received that pleased him most. What really gladdened his heart was that he was able to say Mass, standing in the Church that housed the miraculously preserved body of St Francis Xavier, and participate in the processions on the saint's feast. Had he not prayed ardently to this saint to help him with the development of Bethany?

The feast lasted six days. At the end of it every Bishop who participated was given a memento, a tiny piece of the saint's robe. But Mar Ivanios was not satisfied with that. He went to the Bishop of Goa and asked for a relic of the Saint.

It put the Bishop of Goa in a tight spot, for he had no right to take such a decision on his own. On the other hand, the person who had made the request was an extremely important man, one who had brought so many into the Catholic fold.

"I am sorry, but I cannot take a decision on my own, Your Grace," said the Bishop of Goa. "But I shall consult my colleagues and let you know. I need some time for that."

The Bishop went away to his rooms and called his colleagues together. He found that they were all of the same opinion. "We must give this great man a relic. Let us give him a piece of his little finger."

His happiness knew no bounds when he received the relic as a gift. "Just as your body has not decayed, let not Bethany and the reunited Church decay. Let it grow and live forever," he prayed.

After the feast Mar Ivanios returned to Thirumoolapuram. It was late but his disciples were awaiting his arrival.

"We have become very rich," Mar Ivanios said as he entered the monastery. The residents gaped at him in astonishment. But he showed them his relic and then went into his room to put it away safely.

Ramban Philipose came to see him. "A telegram from the Pope arrived yesterday."

"Where is it? Let me see it," Mar Ivanios said eagerly.

The Ramban gave him the open telegram. Mar Ivanios all but snatched it from his hand. Good news indeed! The Pope had expressed a desire to meet him.

He would have to go to Rome for that. His happiness frothed over. There were other letters, too. Both from within the country and abroad. Many Universities from Rome had sent him congratulatory letters. He was also invited to lecture at all those universities. Some had even sent him the subjects they would like him to speak on.

One of the invitations was from Dublin, the capital of Ireland. The thirty-second World Assembly of the Eucharistic Congress was being held in Dublin that year and he was invited to participate. This was a glorious opportunity to celebrate Mass according to the Syrian rites there he thought.

Another letter was from G. K. Chesterton. He was a world famous writer in the English language, but more important, he had gone over to the Catholic Church from the Protestant. It was even now a matter of debate in that country.

He sat up late into the night reading all the letters, without even having his dinner. There was no time to go to the dining room. Many of the letters needed immediate replies. So he sent for his dinner to his room and while supping he dictated his replies to the Ramban who took them down as fast as he could. There were several people who had come to see him and hear about his Goa experience and to them all he made cogent replies.

"Now you may go and rest," he told the tired Ramban. Mar Ivanios had noticed the Ramban's sleepy eyes.

All the letters that needed immediate replies had been attended to. Now he had to prepare a few talks for his trip. Many institutions in Rome had asked him to speak to them. The audiences would be learned so they would require authoritative lectures.

Surely they would not be averse to talks based on the Indian experience, he thought. He would not require much preparation for that. He would be able to hold forth for an hour or two on topics from Indian literature in general or Malayalam literature in particular with ease. He had done it before in many of the Indian Universities. He could talk about Indian thoughts and religion at the seminars. Some Cultural Institutions also had invited him to speak, and he would

have to think up topics for them.

Once before he had given a talk on old coins and at that time he had read up on the ancient arts and artifacts, he recalled. All the same he would have to read some books. Then he recalled buying a couple of books when he had taken the young novices from Barisol on a picnic. He at once got up and went to his library. He had stowed them away on a particular shelf, he remembered. Yes, they were there. He took them out and dusted them before settling down to read. One was on Indian sculpture and the other was on the revival of Indian Art.

He did not know when day dawned so absorbed was he in his books. When he went out into the sunshine he saw a man bowing low in greeting. As soon as he was noticed he came forward and kissed the Bishop's hand. He vaguely remembered the face but could not place him at first, but with a little thought he recognized the man.

"Does Your Grace remember your servant?" The man was very humble. "I was the one who walked away with the gold chain which was given to Your Grace as a gift."

"What do you want now?" asked Mar Ivanios as he walked up and down.

"Our Church wanted to give your Grace at least one sovereign weight of gold as a chain. But when we had collected the money we found it just enough for three-quarters of a sovereign. I offered to make up the amount and make it one sovereign weight. Before I could explain, Your Grace had fallen asleep and I did not wish to awaken Your Grace. I came back several times, but Your Grace was never available, so I would go away. I have made up the amount and have brought back the chain. I hope Your Grace will accept it."

Mar Ivanios accepted it with a laugh. "Thank you. A good thief."

The other residents of the monastery watched this with deep interest.

He had a lot of work and he had Ramban Philipose to help him. One day he asked the Ramban what work he was involved in.

"I have been entrusted with the work of supervising our schools, and I am doing that."

"Then I am going to relieve you of your work," said Mar Ivanios. The Ramban did not understand so the Bishop explained.

"I want you to surrender all our schools to Mar Dionysius."

"But why?" The Ramban was clearly mystified. "Your Grace

went to such trouble to make the money to buy land and build these schools.”

“That was when we were Jacobites. I have just received a letter from His Grace asking me to return the schools to him. How can I go against the request in his old age?”

The Ramban could not bear it. “They took away our churches and our Bethany press and now if they take away our schools we will have nothing.”

“I will not quarrel over any of these things with His Grace. I do not need them. Just go to Kottayam and give the deeds of the schools to His Grace today itself.”

The Ramban did not say anything. People were coming in daily to join the Catholic Church, and most of them were from the Jacobite Church.

Even V.A. Varghese a close relative of Mar Dionysius, the Secretary K.V.Chacko and Advocate Philipose were among those who came to join the Catholic Church. By this time around five thousand people had joined their Church. A most unusual growth in spite of the opposition.

He could no longer delay his preparations for his journey to Rome. He wanted to meet His Holiness. He wanted to go and personally thank His Holiness for granting permission to join as a new group. There was another reason, too. He wanted to obtain permission to make Trivandrum the headquarters of this group in India. In every way Trivandrum was the best place for it though they did not have even an inch of land in that city. There was no one on his side from that city, so it was possible that he would have to settle for Adoor as their headquarters.

He completed his preparations for his journey to Rome. His passport and other documents were all ready. Before leaving he decided to go and meet his aged parents so he ordered the car to take him to Puthiakav. When they reached Puthenkav they were stopped by a group of young men blocking the road. Thampi used his horn loudly to no effect. The lads would not budge. Instead they started hooting and booing.

Mar Ivanios got out of the car with a smile on his face and just walked into the group quite fearlessly. He started greeting each one, personally, touching each one on his shoulder and asking for his

identity. "Son, who are you?"

As his father's mother was from Puthenkav he knew quite a large number of people there, so it was easy to identify the youngsters.

When they heard his soft voice, a voice so gentle it would melt a stone, they hung their heads. He might be terrifying to look at, but his voice was certainly one to melt hearts, and these boys were no exception. Their anger faded away, and they slowly moved out of the way. Some of them made themselves known to him whereupon he inquired about the relatives he knew.

When the road was clear Mar Ivanios resumed his journey. On the way he was given an important, if upsetting, bit of news. His enemies had filed a false case against him. Mar Dionysius had not accepted the deeds of the Bethany schools sent to him, but had instead claimed that Mar Ivanios was withholding the schools from him. A police warrant had been issued against him and the police were spreading a dragnet for him.

He went straight to his parents' house and received their blessings. Then he set out immediately. He had to outwit his enemies who were obviously intent on preventing his trip to Rome. He must therefore set out for Rome at once, if possible on the morrow itself. He would take Father C. K. Mattathil, Professor at St. Berchman's, with him as he knew many languages and therefore would be of great help to him. Word was sent to the Professor in Changanacherry, to be ready to depart any moment, and then Mar Ivanios looked through his diary to find out if there was anything that could not be postponed until his return.

The following week some young men in the monastery at Vennikulam were ready to take their vows and he was to officiate at it. But in these circumstances that could not be postponed any longer. He stayed up to midnight finishing several things he had to, then went straight to Vennikulam and rang their bell.

The monks came out quite surprised to see who had come so late at night. They were shocked to see Mar Ivanios.

"Those who are ready to take their vows please go into the chapel at once," he said without any preamble. "This is the only time I have to conduct the ceremony."

He did not tarry there after the ceremony but went back to the

monastery in Thirumoolapuram. He had to leave for Ernakulam early in the morning.

There were just two hours to dawn when he reached there. Advocate Philipose was asleep on the verandah and he was aroused by the Bishop's arrival. Mar Ivanios went straight to his cell and shut the door and began to pray. He knelt in front of the cross and began to beat his breast in his agony. He could not bear the thought that efforts were being made to thwart his plans of going to Rome. The advocate hearing the terrible sound got up to investigate. The door was shut, so he looked through the keyhole and saw Mar Ivanios kneeling on the floor beating his breast. He wanted to call out and say, "Don't" but he did not have the courage to do so.

Soon it was morning. Father Mattathil had arrived the evening before with his bag all packed, ready to leave at a moment's notice. Before they left, Mar Ivanios had many instructions to give his people.

"Your Grace must rent a house in Tiruvalla and move into that at once," he told Mar Theophilus.

To Kilileth Chacko he said, "Go to Trivandrum and hire a small house there. As soon as that has been arranged Father Joshua and Father Barsleebe should move into that and stay there."

To the monks he said, "There are two Rambans here to look after the monasteries and the churches here. They will do whatever is necessary."

He blessed them all as they stood with bowed heads and hurried out.

From Ernakulam he went by train to Bombay. He would board the ship from there. Father Mattathil was at the harbour getting the necessary clearances. Mar Ivanios sat in the waiting room, resting after the hectic journey. He was very tired as he sat there imagining the frustration of those who had tried to arrest him. He fell asleep as he sat there, and was roused only when Father Mattathil entered the room. The good father looked as if he had received a shock. Before the Bishop could inquire, the priest extended a telegram to him. "Your Grace's mother —" he began but could not complete the sentence.

Mar Ivanios took the telegram and read the brief message. He leaned back in his chair reading the message again and again sent by his brother, Mathai Panikar. The telegram said, "Our mother is dead."

It was only the other day that she had blessed him and sent him

on his way to Rome. She was very weak, he knew, but he had not expected her to pass away so soon.

It was his mother who had directed him to this life. He recalled the prayers his mother had taught him, the special prayers to the Blessed Virgin, which were his strength even today. She had been a fount of love and now she had gone to her eternal rest.

What should he do now? Should he go back and conduct her funeral rites? In that case he would not be able to go to Rome. The court officials would be hanging around his house waiting to pounce on him and arrest him. They would march him off to the police station immediately.

No! He would not fall into the hands of his enemies. All his life he had put the Church and its affairs before his personal life. So nothing personal should stand in the way of his journey to Rome. If he postponed it, he might never have another chance.

He immediately sent off a telegram to his brother. "Conduct her funeral with all honours. I have to go to Rome."

Then he sent another message to Rome informing them he had boarded the ship.

All through the journey he remembered his mother and the first thing he did after he had embarked was to say a Mass for his late mother.

He neither saw the heavy waves of the sea, nor heard the roar of the strong sea winds. All he saw was the calm face of his mother. All he did was to pray for her.

Chapter 38

He was in the Eternal City. The seat of Peter, first among the Apostles; Rome.

It had been a seven-day journey. He felt unusually at peace when he disembarked. Like the Captain of a ship which has safely docked in port.

Many people from the churches and seminaries had come all anxious to meet him. The harbor was decorated with welcoming banners and streamers in his honour. The Bishop walked out of the ship holding his crosier in his left hand and a smile for all on his face. The crowd parted to give him way and as he walked out he raised his cross and blessed all the people crowded there. He was wearing a red *masanapsa* and saffron robe and the black turban-like formal head-gear of the Jacobite Bishops.

Crowds lined the street. Even those travelling in cars stopped to look at him. People came out of their homes to see this great man and women stood under the shade of the olive trees with their babies in their arms to see him.

He stopped when he saw them. He could not help it, but he handed the crosier to Father Mattathil and picked up one of the babies and kissed it. At once the other mothers came forward with their babies, but he only laughingly blessed them all as he went on his way.

Accommodation had been provided for him and the priest in a monastery. The Pope's representatives, and the Cardinal in charge of the Eastern churches, came there to meet him. "I should like to know how soon I can meet His Holiness the Pope," he told them.

"The audience has been fixed for a day two weeks from now," he was told.

All the Malayali students studying in the various universities came to meet him. He was very impressed by Deacon Thomas Vadasserry of the Changanacherry diocese now studying in a Seminary in Rome. Even after the other students had left Deacon Vadasserry stayed behind. He wanted permission to be allowed to be with the Bishop throughout his stay in Rome.

Mar Ivanios was invited by even Cardinals to be chief guest at all religious functions. He was invited by the British Ambassador in the Vatican to dine with him. The next two weeks were very busy. He was invited to give talks to various colleges. Many churches invited him to give the Sunday Sermons.

Journalists followed him everywhere. They took delight in publishing his speeches and sermons almost verbatim, accompanied by photographs of him, in all the newspapers.

The long awaited day came. The day when he would have an audience with the Head of the Roman Catholic Church. Before that he visited the Basilica of St. Peter in Rome, the biggest Church in the world. A Church filled with the art of Michaelangelo. Above all it was the Church that enshrined the tomb of St. Peter. He had the glorious opportunity of celebrating Mass there.

From there he went to meet the Pope. He was first greeted by the gatekeeper with a salute. The Pope's Secretary came out to meet him. "The Pope is waiting to meet Your Grace. Your Grace has been granted a private audience generally reserved only for Cardinals."

The two of them entered the Pope's private drawing room. Pope Pius XI was standing by his table when they entered. Mar Ivanios knelt at his feet and kissed his hands and said, "Holy Father, in your presence I feel like the prodigal son who has returned to his father."

The Holy Father leaned forward and lifted him and hugged him and said, "You are my good son."

The cameras recorded that meeting for posterity.

Mar Ivanios had much to tell the Pope. He told the Pope about the work he had done, the churches he had built, the monasteries, the convents, orphanages, and schools. Nor did he forget to introduce Father Mattathil to him. The Pope listened with rapt attention and at the end said, "Please give me in writing whatever help you desire of me."

There would be other occasions for them to meet, so there was no need to make haste and write them down immediately. However, he had a special request to ask of the Pope. "We need a patron saint for our Church. "

After a little thought the Pope said, "Let it be St. Peter himself."

And so ended the first audience with the Pope.

He had three more audiences fixed with the Pope. One day while

he was still in the Vatican some students from a college nearby came to the Vatican to meet the Pope. When they learned that Mar Ivanios was in the Vatican they met him first as they had been very impressed by his talk when he had visited their college. They begged him to go with them to meet the Pope.

“That’s not possible. You know that the Pope meets people only by prior appointment. I have an appointment next week.”

However, as the students insisted he agreed and accompanied them into the Pope’s drawing room. He did not forget to carry with him a list of his most urgent demands which he had already made out. As soon as he entered he apologized for his intrusion. “I had to yield to the persuasions of these young people, Holy Father.”

The Pope smiled as he said, “You are always welcome, son. You can always come to me even for purely personal reasons whenever you want, without prior intimation.”

The Pope then spoke to the students, but it was all about Mar Ivanios and the work he had done. He ended by saying, “It is our good fortune that we have Mar Ivanios with us here in Rome.”

Mar Ivanios then handed over the list he had prepared to the Pope. He had one very important request. He wanted Trivandrum to be made the headquarters of the Malankara Syrian hierarchy and Tiruvalla to be made a diocese.

He had submitted this request first because he was aware that it was no easy matter. As soon as such an application is received in Rome the letter is sent to the representatives of the Vatican in the country concerned where the matter is discussed and if they are agreeable such a letter is sent back to Rome and the matter discussed threadbare again. The Pope would give his sanction and issue the Papal Bull only if the committee in Rome agreed. All this would take months, if not years.

Anyway the first application for the same was submitted to the Pope himself, and the Pope read it at once. He handed the application to his secretary and then, “It has been granted.”

Everyone was startled. But Mar Ivanios who had often experienced God’s blessing was happy.

The Pope then retired to his private room with Mar Ivanios. He then picked up a bundle of neatly tied papers and handed it to Mar Ivanios. “These letters are all against you.”

Mar Ivanios burst out crying like a child when he heard this. The Pope quickly moved to his side and laid a comforting hand on his shoulder. He himself wiped away the tears that ran down the Bishop's face. Then he took out a Pallium. Only Archbishops had the right to wear the five- inch wide stole made of fine white wool. The Pope took it out and draped it round Mar Ivanios neck.

Cameras clicked it for posterity.

The new Archbishop's heart swelled with joy. "Go to the office in charge of the Churches in the East and get them to issue the necessary Bull for the new hierarchy, ready for my signature."

The Archbishop went to the office of the representative of the East. The Cardinals there smiled slowly. They thought that the new Archbishop might have mistaken the Pope's instructions. After all he was very new to all this, wasn't he? So they took it upon themselves to explain to him in detail the rules and regulations of the Church.

The Archbishop listened patiently and at the end of it smiled and said. "I understand that you are instructing me in the laws of the Church. I confess I have not studied it in detail, but I can assure you of one thing. His Holiness the Pope has already sanctioned the matter."

The Cardinals were stunned. Never before in the history of the Church had such a thing happened. One Cardinal slowly commented, "It is an old saying that Rome moves slowly. But for the first time today that has been overturned."

"For the last thirty years Dr Benziger has been trying to make Trivandrum the headquarters of the Latin Catholics and has not succeeded," commented another.

The new Archbishop could only smile in response. The other Cardinals sat there charmed by his smile.

One Cardinal ran up to him and kissed him on his cheek and said, "Had I been the Pope I would have made you a Cardinal."

"Praise the Lord that you are not the Pope," was the smiling retort.

The Papal Bull sanctioning the new hierarchy was typed and needed only the Pope's signature. That would be done and posted to him in India. The Archbishop knelt down and kissed the Pope's hand and thanked him for granting his request. Then said, "Grant me leave

to depart for my homeland.”

“I plan to attend the Holy Eucharistic Congress in Ireland on my way home. Before that I shall stop over in London as I have an invitation to meet King George V,” he said outlining his travel plans to the Pope.

“King George’s Viceroy is ruling in India. It will be good to strengthen ties with him,” said the Pope.

The Pope then took out a letter and gave it to Mar Ivanios. “The King and the Queen were here to visit me. I have written a letter to them which I would like you to carry for me.”

The Archbishop accepted the letter and took his leave.

Before leaving for Ireland he sent a telegram to Ramban Joseph Pulikkottil. “I have been made Archbishop of Trivandrum by His Holiness. Please go to Trivandrum immediately and find a house for me to live in.”

Then straight on to Dublin, where thousands had already gathered to attend the Congress which was to take place there.

The Archbishop alighted at the venue. He was quite surprised to find a fat, well-dressed man kneeling humbly before him. Someone whispered to him that it was the writer Gilbert Keith Chesterton.

“Oh! G.K. Chesterton!” exclaimed the Archbishop as he went forward to meet him.

G.K. Chesterton was an acknowledged literary figure in England, and a great believer, but he stood in front of the Archbishop for a moment as if mesmerized. He was about fifty-eight years of age and had joined the Roman Catholic Church four years ago. He had heard of Mar Ivanios and his efforts to come back to the fold then. Ever since Mar Ivanios had joined the Catholics two years ago this literary figure had been waiting for an opportunity to meet the great prelate. He was eight years older than the prelate, but in his heart he acknowledged him as his teacher, father and guide. As he stood like some sculptured statue in marble, staring at the saffron robed figure coming towards him he wondered if it was some great Hindu philosopher and teacher who was approaching him.

And no wonder. With his high turban-like Bishop’s hat, and thick graying beard, and the alert intelligent look on his face, he looked like a King of bygone times. An Indian king who had been consecrated a bishop. Perhaps he was Prester John himself. Surely he was

the reincarnation of that ancient John who was both king and priest. The name Ivanios was after all, another version of John, he realized as he recalled that ancient legend when he saw this latter-day believer from India.

It was only when he heard his voice that Chesterton came to life again. "I have read your articles in the papers and in books," said Mar Ivanios.

When he heard the chaste English Chesterton was even more astonished and he stood there without responding but enjoying the compliment. The wonder grew within his heart. Could it be possible that this controversial prelate could have had the time to read his own works? He must be a superhuman being!

Slowly Chesterton came back to life again and kissed the Archbishop's hand and began talking.

In Dublin he celebrated Holy Mass according to the Syrian rites. In his sermon he spoke about the special qualities of the eastern form of worship which was very enlightening for the congregation.

At the end of the service the Governor invited him to dinner. He also invited Chesterton. As they walked to his palace, the journalists followed them in large numbers requesting photographs. The Governor stopped at the foot of the steps that led into the palace and faced the photographers with the Archbishop beside him. Noticing that Chesterton had tactfully stayed out of the camera, the Archbishop invited him to join them.

"Who am I to join this group?" he wondered. "How can I pose for a photograph with the Archbishop?"

However, he accepted the invitation and joined them for the photograph. After lunch the three took leave of each other.

The Archbishop had another engagement in Dublin. He was to attend a convention of the Legion of Mary, a convention in praise of Mary. The next day on his way to this convention he got a paper called "Universe" and opened it to find a large photograph of his, taken during his speech at the Congress, splashed on the front page. It had reproduced his speech in toto. Without stopping to read it he glanced at the other pages and there was another photograph of his with the caption "Prester John" under it followed by a long article in his praise written by G. K. Chesterton. A fitting tribute to a great man.

Chapter 39

It seemed to him that six months went by in a flash. It was time to go home. He had the satisfaction of knowing that he had succeeded in doing what he had planned to do.

He was returning by plane, though he had earlier planned to travel back by ship. He had a sudden urge to return to his homeland because of a rumour that he heard.

He was about to leave London for Belgium when he received a telegram from Ramban Pulikkottil saying that the Trivandrum had been given to the Latin Catholics as their headquarters. He at once contacted Rome and was relieved to hear that it was a false alarm. Trivandrum had been earmarked for the new group.

Though he realized it was just a rumour he decided to go back to his homeland. He travelled to Karachi by plane, and from there to Bombay by ship and from Bombay by train.

It was ten o' clock in the night when the train reached Trivandrum. Many people, including non-Christians had gathered at the station. All eyes were turned to the direction the train would come from. In front were the residents of the monastery and the two Rambans. Next to Ramban Pulikkottil, there was a tall, bald-headed man, dressed in white handspun, hand woven *khadi*, and who looked every inch a leader among men. It was none other than the great Malayalam poet, Vallathol Narayana Menon. He had in his hand a white *khadi* shawl to drape around the Archbishop.

The immediate arrival of the train was announced and everyone moved forward ready to receive the Archbishop. But just then there was a power failure, plunging the entire Railway Station and the neighbourhood into total darkness. The Archbishop had many enemies, too. Those who had obtained an arrest warrant against him, had not forgotten their humiliation and would not hesitate to harm him somehow.

Chacko Kilileth immediately made his way out and bought some candles, which were lit and handed to those in the front row. The whistle of the approaching was heard round the corner, and then the

train roared into the station. It was difficult to find the Archbishop's compartment, but as the train slid to a halt, the lights came on again. And there was the Archbishop standing in the doorway with a smile on his lips.

Amidst the cheers of welcome the poet went forward and draped the shawl he had brought round the Archbishop's shoulders and recited a couplet he had created at that very moment.

Mar Ivanios was tired after his long journey, but he stood around chatting to those who had come to receive him at the station. Soon Ramban Pulikkottil came up to him and drew him away to the car he had arranged for the Archbishop. As he got into the back of the car, he noticed an old man curled in the corner of the seat. He looked closely in the dim light and realized it was his aged father who had come to receive him, in spite of the late hour. He sank into the seat beside his ninety-year old father. Ramban Pulikkottil and Chacko Kilileth got in front beside the driver.

He asked his father about his mother's funeral. The old man's voice was weak and slurred so Mar Ivanios had to lean close to his father to hear and understand his words. "The funeral was a grand one and we have to thank Chackochen here for all the trouble he took to arrange it. He went to the S.B College in Changanacherry and told Father Purackal about her death. The good father immediately informed all the other priests and they all came with silver crosses and ornamental umbrellas."

Chackochen then turned round to the Archbishop. "I have rented a house in Vellayambalam big enough to accommodate three or four people. It belongs to Dr. Raman Thampi and he has rented it to us for Rs. Seventy-five a month."

"That's good, Chackochen. But we need a church here in the city. We do not have the money to buy land and build a church here, so please find a building that we can convert into a church."

Chackochen accepted the new project.

The car slid to a halt in front of the house in Vellayambalam. As the Archbishop got out he saw the buntings fluttering in the night breeze. It was almost midnight so there were very few people to receive him.

They did not own even an inch of land in Trivandrum. Nor did he have the influence he wielded elsewhere. All the same he had had

the city sanctioned as the headquarters of the fledgling Church, much to the astonishment of everyone. This state of affairs would have to change. They would have to establish the Malankara hierarchy first, and for that he would have to get in touch with Dr. Benziger. The latter, however, was puzzled. The new group had no church in the city so how would the hierarchy be established. For that matter, the Vatican's representative in India was also perplexed.

It was not easy to find the kind of building the Archbishop desired, but one day he heard a bit of promising news. A cinema hall in Palayam was going to be sold.

"Go at once and do what is necessary to buy that," the Archbishop told Chackochen who had brought the news.

Chackochen set out at once with the money he had somehow collected for the advance which had to be paid to fix the deal. And so the theatre "The Pompidour" in the heart of Trivandrum was bought in order to be converted into a church of their own. It was big enough to hold a large number of people. Once the necessary repairs were carried out and the alterations made, it would make a very good church. The residents of the monasteries and the workmen lost no time in beginning the work on it.

By this time they had acquired a few acres of land in Nalanchira. There were about twelve acres in all on two sides of the road. Eight acres on one side and four on the other. The eight-acre plot was on a slope. Just the right spot for a monastery. There was a small dilapidated building which if repaired would be enough for about four or five people to live in. The other plot was equally good. The only hitch was that the Archbishop did not have any money for any new project. That did not prevent him from asking Chackochen to buy the land.

"Somehow or other we must make the money and buy that land."

He had on his trip to Rome been invited to give talks and he had been gifted money when he left. He put together all that and borrowed the rest to buy the land. Jacob was entrusted with the task of looking after that project.

Then he went to Vennikulam. He had not seen the monks and the residents of that monastery for a long time now. When they saw their beloved teacher his disciples forgot all their problems. He, however, inquired into all their concerns and gave them the necessary

guidance.

He called one of them to him, one Deacon Pakomios O.I.C. and said, "We have bought some land in Nalanchira. I want you to go there with some workmen and build a compound wall and clear the land."

Deacon Pakomios nodded his head vigorously. Like Deacon Alexander who was now Father Seraphion he was very good in construction work. The next morning he set out for Nalanchira with a few good workmen.

The Archbishop celebrated Mass in the chapel in the monastery the next morning. The congregation was composed of the ascetics in the monastery all of them dressed in saffron. There was an exception however. There was a young lad dressed in white clothes. A lad of seventeen years or so. A good looking boy with a sculptured body and calm eyes that reflected his spirituality.

Everyone in the monastery knew him well. T.E. Varghese, popularly known as Kunjukutty, was the

eldest son of the old but impoverished Thangalathil family in Kalloopara, living near the Kadamankulam Bethany church. He was actually a Jacobite but he attended Mass in the Bethany Churches, either in the Kadamankulam Church near his home or the Bethany Church in Vennikulam. With his gentle smile and pleasant manner of speech he was a favourite with everyone in the monastery.

After the Mass the sexton placed a chair at the western end of the church and the Archbishop came and sat there as usual. He used to sit there and meditate if there was no one, or talk to those who hung around the church after Mass. He would call them over and inquire about their families. Today his eye fell on Kunjukutty.

The Archbishop knew him well. He had first met the boy before his trip to Rome when he had gone to the Kadamankulam Bethany Church to celebrate Mass. To all who had joined the Catholic Church he had said, "From now onwards you are no longer Jacobites. You are now Catholics."

When he heard that Kunjukutty charged forward through the crowd and asked passionately, "Are we not Christians then?"

Obviously the poor boy was convinced that the Jacobite Church was the true Church. Even today the Archbishop could recall every expression on the boy's face as he spoke to him then.

The Archbishop had put his arm round the boy who so passionately defended the Church of his fathers. The boy calmed down under that healing touch. Mar Ivanios had then called Father Barsleebea and had entrusted the boy into his care. "Please teach this young one all about the Catholic Church."

Father Barsleebea must have taught him well, which was why he was standing in front of him with such a sad expression of repentance on his face.

The Archbishop asked him to come nearer and the boy did so looking like a young lamb in front of a lion.

"What do you think now?" asked the Archbishop.

"I understand everything now, Your Grace. What Father Barsleebea explained and what the history teacher taught in school is one and the same. Therefore I want to join the Catholic Church," answered Kunjukutty.

He had earlier told his relative, Father Abraham, of his desire not only to join the Catholic Church but also to become a monk, and Father Abraham had told the Archbishop about it.

All the same Mar Ivanios said, "Father Abraham told me that you were working in Kottayam. Where were you working?"

"I got a job in an Insurance company. But I realized that that was not my vocation and gave it up before coming here."

The Archbishop sat for a while pondering over the situation then said firmly, "You said you wanted to join the monastery. If so you must join now. You cannot postpone it."

Kunjukutty had not expected to join immediately but now he would have to decide on his future at once. In a minute he thought of several things.

His parents were ardent Jacobites. They would not be able to bear it if he switched over to the Catholic Church so suddenly. His father had been very happy when he got a job in the Insurance company. If he knew that he had resigned it because he wanted to become a monk——! He doubted whether even his mother would support him. The present Catholicos was related to his mother and she would not want to offend him.

What was he to do?

He gathered his courage and said firmly, "I want to become a monk, Your Grace."

The Archbishop called Father Abraham and said, "Please have this boy join our monastery immediately."

Chapter 40

The theatre Pompidour became St Mary's Church. If the official functions of the church were to take place he would have to consecrate it as a place of worship, but he had not yet received the Maharajah's permission for that.

According to the rules of the Roman Catholic Church once permission for the creation of a hierarchy was issued the necessary functions establishing it would have to take place within six months of the order. That period would soon expire. He had sent many letters to the palace without eliciting any response. Perhaps his enemies were at work to prevent this. He had heard that the Maharajah was opposed to his request and that was something the Archbishop could not bear to think of.

The Archbishop went back to Nalanchira with a heavy heart. The existing building there had been repaired and Pakomios O.I.C and other monks were now staying there. The Archbishop went straight to the chapel and sat there praying for the necessary permission. He sat there night and day like a little child pleading with God. His prayers were answered, for shortly after that the monastery bell rang to announce the presence of a visitor. It was a messenger from the palace with permission for a church in Palayam.

Everyone threw themselves into the work. The date for the consecration of the church and the creation of the hierarchy was fixed for March twelfth. Invitations to the function had to be written and sent to the various dignitaries and well-wishers. Chacko Kilileth went to the people nearby and handed over the invitations personally, and posted the rest.

The church building and the neighbourhood were decorated with buntings and streamers and ornamental umbrellas.

The guests arrived well ahead of time. There were many government officials and representatives of the royal family who came to the consecration. There was no dearth of bishops, either.

Mar Ivanios celebrated Mass. It was the first ever celebration of Mass in the Cathedral of the Malankara Syrian Catholic Church. After

the Mass was over the Papal Bull was read out, both in Latin and in its translation in Malayalam. Then Mar Ivanios knelt down for a blessing in front of the Bishop of Ernakulam, Augustine Kandathil.

After the prayers, Mar Ivanios was seated on his throne. Four or five priests lifted him high, throne and all three times shouting “Oxios” and the congregation echoed that cry which means: you are the one fit for this.

Then the Archbishop got up to speak. Most of it was a description of his Roman tour. At the end of it everyone kissed the hand of the new Archbishop and departed.

Even the aged Dr. Benziger came up to him in spite of his infirmities and embraced him. “God has granted me the grace of initiating a new rite in the Catholic fold thus giving a new meaning to my life. I owe all this to your untiring efforts. How quickly have all the procedures been rushed through! I must admit, however, that I had my doubts at first.”

That caught his attention and Mar Ivanios waited eagerly to hear more.

“Remember the first time you celebrated Mass after joining the Catholic Church?” continued Dr. Benziger. “The Mass was celebrated in Malayalam and that caused misgivings in me. You were supposed to belong to the Syrian order, and here you were saying Mass in Malayalam, not in Syrian. Frankly, I immediately wrote to Rome about this and my doubts concerning it.”

“What reply did you get to that?”

“It was in your favour. It said that you should be allowed to say Mass in the language of your choice. That was the reply.”

Both of them burst out laughing.

“We have been using an exact translation of the Syrian service in Malayalam for a few years now. Syriac must have been prevalent in this country for many years even before Christianity. According to ancient History Armaic was prevalent in this country even during the times of the Emperor Ashoka,” said Mar Ivanios.

“Is that so?” Dr. Benziger was obviously surprised.

“Well, many of the inscriptions on the monuments of his period were clearly Armaic.”

Dr. Benziger was obviously impressed and delighted by that conversation and he hugged Mar Ivanios in delight before departing

for Quilon.

And so the roots of the new Syrian Catholic Church took firm hold in the soil of the capital of the state. Now it would have to put out new branches and leaves and become a shade for the weak and suffering. That was his aim.

The new convent was ready for occupation in Nalanchira. It was Mar Ivanios who had found the best site for it, and it was the untiring efforts of Father Seraphion that helped in completing the building. But it was Yacob who used his skill to find pure, sweet water near the convent.

The nuns in Thirumoolapuram were then shifted to Nalanchira and housed into the newly-built convent. The monks who moved into the monastery from Vennikulam had brought with them a very important treasure. A suitcase with a skull and some bones. They had opened the grave of their beloved Father Stephen and had carefully packed his mortal remains in the suitcase. This was one thing none of them forgot when they left for Trivandrum. They carried his bones with them wherever they went much like the Israelites who carried the bones of Joseph when they left Egypt for the Promised Land.

The first thing they did when they came to Nalanchira was to dig a grave. Then they made all arrangements for a reburial. The nuns and the monks gathered in the grounds for the ceremony. Thangalathil Kunjukutty was also there.

The Church grew as the days went by. But they found that they had not enough room for their administrative offices. The house in Vellayambalam was too small for them to provide both living quarters for the Archbishop and his attendants, and offices of administration. Nor could they move to Nalanchira as that was meant for the monks.

The only solution was to acquire a new building for the Office of the Archdiocese. This time Chackochen who was the Archbishop's manager found a new ally. A school teacher named Mathai from Pandalam generally known as Malancheruvil Mathai *Saar*¹. He was

1 *Saar*: a corruption of the English word 'Sir'. In malayalam it is always added after the name and has now become a respectful form of address

a dark complexioned capable looking man. A school teacher who had given up his profession to follow the Archbishop. He was a well-known orator in the Jacobite Church but he had joined the Catholic Church recently.

The Archbishop first sent him to work among the lower classes of people. He worked among the poor of Ullanoor, near Pandalam. He had put up a palm-thatched hut near his house where he used to teach the children of the lower and poorer section of society how to read and write. Then he followed it up with Bible classes. He used to get hold of a projector and show silent movies on the life of Jesus Christ to the people there.

The Archbishop had heard of his efforts and was impressed, which was why he began to entrust him with more responsible work. He entrusted the task of buying land to him, as he knew how to handle the problems that arose because of squatters on the land. Mathai *Saar* was extremely useful in all such matters. The Archbishop thought very highly of his capabilities and he was soon one of his most trusted workers and had moved from Pandalam to Trivandrum.

One day he heard about the availability of some land. "A widow in Pattom wants to give her land on lease for a few years. It is near the main road in Sharavanakunnu."

"It would be very useful if we got it," said the Archbishop. The convent and the monastery and the Church were all near by. Besides there was a large house on the land good enough for their use even if it was old.

They were able to take it on lease as they had hoped and made plans to move into the house there. They would be able to give back the house they had hired in Vellayambalam.

Pattom was at the farthest end of the town. In fact after Pattom there were woods on either side of the public road. Woods full of foxes that howled all night and no human habitation at all.

The land was cleared and the house was cleaned up and repaired and the Archbishop was soon able to move into it. Part of the building was used to house the office and its essential personnel. Father Mattathil was appointed in charge of all parish priests. He also looked after the finances.

The Archbishop also sent for Yacob. "You are going to be a lay preacher of the Catholics from now on," the Archbishop told him.

“You will have to go among the people and preach the Word of God to them.”

Yacob’s heart was full of joy. He had been a poor Pulaya slave boy, but the Archbishop had redeemed him and given him a new life. Today he would be able to go out with dignity and authority among the people and preach to them. He fell at the feet of the Archbishop in gratitude.

“You will not be alone,” continued the Prelate. “You will be accompanied by a group of preachers all wearing the same uniform. All the Preachers will have to wear a uniform. A white coat, a turban and a badge to distinguish you from the others. It is possible that our enemies may seek to harm you by concocting cases against and handing you over to the Police. In such an event your uniform will stand you in good stead.”

People who were willing to work as preachers were soon found. They donned the uniform and then set out on their mission. The Archbishop gave the group a new name, the Bharat Suvishesha Sangham or The Indian Gospel Association. Their initials were B.S.S.

“There must be a uniformity about your work. A uniformity in thought and appearance. The Bethany priests cannot manage all the work by themselves, so we need lay preachers to take on some of the work load. The monks have to maintain the old Syrian tradition, too, beard and robes and all. So you also should have a uniformity about your work and appearance,” said the Archbishop.

“Your goal is to spread the teachings of Jesus Christ. Do not try to convert anyone forcibly. Accept into our fold only those who are absolutely willing to do so,” said the Archbishop as he ended his farewell talk.

They went out with the words of their shepherd ringing in their ears, clutching their Bibles to their chest. There were many people to preach to.

Very soon the results of their work could be seen especially in the southern regions. Those who heard the Gospel came forward to accept baptism. Father Mattathil went around baptizing all those who were willing, and then would see they had churches to go to.

Their places of worship did not have to be proper buildings. A shelter thatched with palm leaves was more than enough, but even for that there was not enough money. Very often the Archdiocese

bore half the cost of such cheap constructions. The rest of the money was made up by contributions from the congregation. This was a very practical plan and the membership of the church grew.

Often there were problems.

The widow who had leased her land to them suddenly demanded it back. The lease had not yet expired, so it was quite an irresponsible demand, no doubt inspired by their enemies. Many advised the Archbishop to file a suit against her, but he did not approve of the idea. Had they gone to court they could perhaps have stayed on until the lease expired, but he only prayed to the Lord to show them a way out.

And the Lord heard his prayer, for they heard that a Muslim gentleman was anxious to sell ten acres of land in Pattom itself. Chackochen went and looked over the land and found that it was by the roadside on a beautiful slope with a building in the middle of it.

The Archbishop bought the land. Soon they carried all their goods into the new property and settled in.

The Gospel workers were doing good work and soon the poor in the villages began to awaken. Hundreds became Christians, which infuriated the upper castes, and they began to treat the new converts very cruelly. Soon the downtrodden began to flee the villages, and they sought refuge with the Archbishop. When he heard their sad stories of grinding poverty and their incurable illnesses, the Archbishop's heart was moved and he decided he was not going to send them away.

By this time the Church had acquired some land on the other side of the road. A cemetery was a necessity and this land would do very well for the purpose.

But a couple of palm thatched buildings were built there and the refugees housed in them. Soon they were learning the Bible there. One of the refugees, an old man, died of his illness. A grave was dug for him in a corner of the property, and the Archbishop prepared to bury him there but the Hindus in the neighbourhood heard of it and came rushing in, bent on preventing the burial.

"You cannot bury a dead body here," they said.

"Can you give me a reason for it?" asked the Archbishop in a stern voice.

"We do not like the idea of a cemetery near our homes," they

declared.

“Oh! I see.”

The Archbishop did not say anything for a while but stood there deep in thought. Then turning to his companions he said, “Please wait here for me. I am going out for a while, but I shall return soon.”

His driver held the door of his coffee-coloured Buick car which had been presented to him by a rich man in Europe, an unusually long and wide car. The number plate was 300.

Maybe because it was a large car that a large man was appointed as a driver to drive it about. Geevarghese the driver, was Chacko Kilileth's elder brother's son. With his huge frame and the fierce looking moustaches on his face he was a very impressive figure, indeed.

The Archbishop got into his car and asked the driver to go south. No one knew where he was going. He had the car drive straight to the Palace. There he went in and sat down quite prepared to wait for a long time if necessary in the Durbar hall. He wanted to see the Maharajah.

He looked around the walls and saw the paintings that hung on the walls. He was particularly struck by one of the paintings, that of Sri Moolam² Thirunal. Something in the painting, perhaps the suggestion of a mosque in the background, spoke of religious tolerance. He sat staring at the picture until he heard the sound of the Maharajah approaching.

The Maharajah appeared before him dressed in his formal clothes and wearing a shining turban on his head. Sri Chithira Thirunal Balarama Verma himself. A smile spread over that young beardless face as he recognized the Archbishop and he asked what the matter was.

“We need a place to bury our dead, Your Highness and I do have some land in Pattom for that. This morning an old man died, but when we tried to bury him there some of the neighbours objected. Please help us, Your Highness,” pleaded the Archbishop.

The Rajah at once sent for his clerk. The latter wrote out the order and he signed it. Then he handed the order over to the Archbishop with a smile and said, “Go ahead with the burial.”

Chapter 41

Round about this time the Maharajah appointed a new advisor, an extremely rigid man. He was a good administrator, a very clever man, and extremely sharp-witted. Sir C.P. Ramaswamy Aiyer. Dressed in silk dhoti worn in the Brahmin fashion, white turban on his head, and a jacket, he was a notable man indeed.

Mar Ivanios decided he would meet Sir C.P., as he was popularly known, on the day he joined the palace, and went there accordingly. The meeting was to ensure the growth of the Church. Sir C.P. was no stranger to him. Mar Ivanios had met the astute lawyer in the days of the *Vattipanam* case, when he had come to plead the case and had recognized his abilities and his daring. His reputation had certainly grown in the intervening period, both as regards his severity of attitude and in his self-valuation.

He not only met Sir C.P. in the palace, but he also invited him to the Archbishop's palace. The invitation was duly accepted.

The Archbishop spared no effort to make the visit a success. The Bishop's Palace was decorated, and a Brahmin cook hired to make suitable dishes for the guest. He even had a present ready to give the new Advisor. The monastery was in need of many essentials, but all that was set aside to make the visit a grand success.

But they waited in vain. The lawyer did not come.

Mar Ivanios understood the reason behind it. Sir C.P. Ramaswamy Aiyer was after all an ardent defender of the upper castes, and he himself was not. Had he not befriended the poor lower castes? That must have influenced Sir C.P. Or else, the upper castes finding themselves unable to hold out strongly, had sought the help of the Brahmin lawyer.

So for the first time in his life Mar Ivanios suffered a snub. How he should handle this was his next concern.

He could, of course, ignore the snub and forgive him for it, but it was not a personal matter. It affected the whole community. The Church was in its infancy and if Sir C.P. intended to use his authority to kill the growth of the Church he would have to be prevented from doing so. The fledgling Church should not be crushed by the arrogance

of the lawyer. If he found that there was no one to oppose him he would flatten everyone around him——that was the kind of man Sir C.P. was. The administrator would have to be taught that it was better to live amicably with other people.

Mar Ivanios did not have to wait long for an opportunity. Austin, the English Diwan, was retiring from his post and returning to England. Austin was a great friend of his, so the Archbishop decided to give him a grand formal send off in his Bishop's Palace. A date was fixed and all the necessary arrangements for a grand function were made. Invitations were written out and sent to every important official in the government. A canopy had been set up in the garden and children were lined up with bouquets of flowers to give the guests.

Only one important man had not been invited——Sir C.P. Ramaswamy Aiyer.

There were just two hours to the function when the Archbishop pulled out an invitation card and addressed it to the Advisor with this apologetic note. "The guest list to this function was made out from the Visitor's Book we maintain here. Your name was missing from it and so unfortunately we forgot to send you an invitation earlier, and remembered it only now. Nevertheless I hope you will attend the function."

The invitation was sent with a messenger, who returned just before the function began. "He cannot attend the function, Your Grace. He has to attend a function in the Arts College."

In spite of Sir C.P.'s absence the function went off very well. The Archbishop used his speech to good effect and made some pointed references to the situation.

"Religious bodies and the government should work in tandem if the country is to progress. Give unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's and give unto God the things which are God's is a very good principle to follow. The living must have places of worship and the dead must have cemeteries to be buried in. The rules and regulations, which are in force against these needs, should be withdrawn as soon as possible." The sonorous voice of Mar Ivanios reached beyond the confines of the Bishop's Palace and through the papers it reached Sir C.P. also.

The Archbishop was relaxing in his easy chair after a hard day's work. He was lying back in his chair enjoying the pleasant breeze

when Ramban Philipose brought him the first issue of their new magazine. He glanced through it at once and found it was good and said so. "Good. We should have more of such publications. We should have magazines that carry in depth articles on our faith. And it should reach every one of our people."

"We are trying hard for that. We have quite a good group of priests and laymen who can write well."

"I should like you to take on another job, Rambachen. I want you to write some good texts for our children in our Sunday Schools."

So far they had been using the texts prepared by the Archbishop himself. This request pleased the Ramban who liked this kind of work the most. While they were discussing the matter a stranger came in requesting to see the Archbishop. He had with him a sealed envelope which he held out to the Archbishop, and then said, "I am Sir C.P.'s private secretary. My name is Shanmukham and I have been asked to give this to Your Grace."

The Archbishop pulled out his reading glasses from the pocket of his cassock and fixed it on his nose. Then he opened the letter and looked at the Conch seal¹ on the letter. The letter was typed in English and obviously of some seriousness, for the Archbishop sprang to his feet looking very angry and turned on Shanmukham.

"Is he the Maharajah's advisor or the one who is out to take revenge? Go and tell him that I am not willing to do so. It seems he wants us to get out of this place so he can do some social service here. What social service? Whatever social service he has planned is not going to be a patch on the kind of work we are doing here."

Shanmukham hung his head and stood there and did not reply. The others were not quite sure of what was happening, and did not dare to ask for a clarification. However, they understood something was amiss.

The letter was a demand that the Archbishop surrender the ten-acre plot he had bought, to the Advisor so that the government could use it for social service projects of its own.

The Archbishop took the hapless Shanmukham to the land set aside for the cemetery, and showed him the palm thatched huts he

1 Conch seal : royal seal

had set up for the poor people who had sought refuge there. "These poor people sought refuge here from the upper castes who were harassing them. Does the Advisor want to show how great he is by convicting these people?"

Shanmukham stood there without saying a word. The Archbishop tore the letter and gave the pieces to the poor secretary and told him to go back. "Go and give this to your boss and tell him that I will tear to bits whatever wicked plans he has just as I have torn his letter."

Shanmukham stowed the torn bits of the letter into his pocket and went on his way.

The Archbishop used to visit all the refugees living in the huts behind his Palace and comfort them. There were also a few priests who had come from the Syro-Malabar group staying there. They came from Pala, Kanjirapally, and Changanacherry and obviously belonged to wealthy families.

Many of them were young priests. They had given up all the comforts of their homes and were staying here to strengthen the new movement. They helped by caring for the sick and teaching the Word of God. In the night they would draw two benches together and sleep on that. To them he said one day, "Let us go to the convent. It is a long time since we had any news of them."

"Shall I send for the driver, Your Grace?"

"Why do you need a driver to go to Nalanchira? You do not get petrol free, do you? Come on, let's walk."

Twirling his walking stick, the Archbishop walked along the road with the priests following him. It was evening, but the heat of the sun had not waned much. So they kept to the side of the road walking under the shade of the trees. When they reached the convent, he asked the priests to wait in front of the gate while he went round to the back to the kitchen.

He found the kitchen door ajar, with no one about. The nuns were obviously inside absorbed in their prayers. He undid his sandals and walked into the kitchen on bare feet, as he did not want to disturb the nuns at their prayers, nor even let them know he was here.

Nuns were not likely to reveal to anyone that they were starving. This was the only way he could find out about their true state of affairs. He examined their rice bin and all their containers and vessels. There was no rice in the bin at all. There was some cooked rice

for dinner, a spinach curry and a papaya vegetable dish. In another vessel he found some boiled tapioca.

The rice was not enough for half the nuns there. The rest would fill their stomachs with tapioca.

He put away all the vessels as he had found them and went outside to where his companions were waiting for him. He sent one of them back with explicit orders.

“Go back and send a coolie with a sack of rice. Buy some lentils and some vegetables and send them also.”

When the nuns came out of their chapel they were astonished to see their beloved teacher and guide, and hurried out to meet him.

“I heard that some new nuns had joined you here. I came to meet them,” said the Archbishop.

Mother Shaino introduced them to the Archbishop. He talked to each one of them offering advice where necessary. He took particular note of one of them. She was Sister Hemsä from the Quilon Diocese.

“How do you like the setup here?” he inquired gently.

“Very much,” she answered nodding her head.

The Archbishop walked about looking at the cultivated areas. There was a good vegetable garden, and the coconut palms were heavy with the nuts.

“Hasn’t Mathaichen come to pick the coconuts? They look ready to be picked,” he said.

“He said he would come back this week,” answered Mother Hooba. “He has gone home in connection with some court case.” It was Mathai Saar who looked after the cultivation.

He would return in time with a man to pick the coconuts. He would set aside enough for the needs of the convent then pile all the rest into a bullock cart and send it to the Bishop’s Palace.

A little later a coolie arrived, dripping sweat, as he carried a sack of rice on his back. “Haven’t I told you to ask me for whatever you require here in the convent?” he asked a trifle sternly to the Mother Provincial. Then turning to the coolie he said, “Go and put the rice into the rice bin.”

Then he took out some money from his pocket and gave it to Mother saying, “Use this to buy a good milch cow. You have plenty of good grass for the cow to feed on in this compound.”

Mother accepted the money with heartfelt gratitude.

He had another matter to impart to them.

“Two miles away from here there is a place called Aruvicode. I am buying a school building there and I propose to entrust the school to you. What do you say?”

“That’s just wonderful, Your Grace.”

“In that case I shall buy a bullock cart for you to travel to the school and back.”

“Thank you, Your Grace.”

From there the Archbishop went to the Bethany monastery. The monks would be most unhappy if they found he had visited the convent next door and not visited them.

He was sitting in an easy chair on the verandah calmly discussing their future plans, when he suddenly noticed two or three people walking very quickly up the hill. He seemed to remember the man who led the way. Father Abraham of Kalloopara said, “That is Idiculla of the Thangalathil family and his relatives.”

They came up and stood in front of the Archbishop, obviously very angry. “I have heard that my son Kunjukutty is here. I have come here to take him home,” said Idiculla.

“Your son is sitting in meditation now, but I shall send for him,” said the Archbishop very calmly.

“If he wants to return with you, I have no objection to his going.”

Father Abraham went in and brought Kunjukutty out. When Idiculla saw him he was even more angry.

“You have frightened us out of our wits not knowing what had happened to you. You could have told your mother at least of your plans. You said you were going to Eraviperoor when you left home.”

With tears running down his face, Kunjukutty answered, “I am extremely sorry I had to leave home without telling you, Father. You must forgive me. I was very sure you would not allow me to join the monastery if I had told you about it.”

It was Father Abraham who had helped them find the young boy. He had even given them the money for the journey.

Idiculla turned to the Archbishop and said, “We are poor people, Your Grace. We have only this one boy to help us overcome our poverty. He did not even tell us he was changing his Church. I am

willing to forgive that, but I cannot permit him to stay here and be a monk. I am taking him back at once.” He sprang forward and caught hold of Kunjukutty’s arm in a firm grip.

“No violence here, please.” The Archbishop’s voice was stern. “Just listen to what he has to say.”

Kunjukutty gathered his courage and said, “I have always wanted to live the life of a monk. I want you to give me permission and bless me, Father. I have set out to do God’s work, so He will take care of our problems. God gave us problems but He will also help us find a way out of them.”

Father Barsleebe came out bearing coffee for the guests. Idiculla was so unhappy he did not even accept a cup but stood aside glowering at everyone. It seemed to him his heart was breaking and the tears ran down his face.

He had never seen his father cry before and this made Kunjukutty even more unhappy. But he only prayed. “God please accept my father’s tears. Please help me find a way so that I can follow my vocation.”

Chapter 42

Akbar, the big watchdog in the Bishop's Palace was barking furiously. It was a signal that something unusual was happening in the vicinity.

The Archbishop was seated in his room polishing the text of his latest book, "Sathyavishvasa Samskhepam", written specially for the benefit of the Nadar community that seemed to be joining the Catholic fold *en masse*. His aim was to enlighten them in their beliefs. His concentration was disturbed by unusual sounds, in addition to the furious barking of the dog. There were strange voices out there in the garden and also the jangle of chains being drawn.

The Archbishop got up from his chair and went to the window. He could not believe his eyes. There were policemen with guns and batons and revenue officers. He recognized one of them. It was none other than Shanmukham, Sir C.P.'s private secretary.

They were engaged in the task of measuring the land, and they had dug in posts and were drawing chains for the purpose.

As they had taken all the necessary precautions against an attack they were working quite fearlessly.

How could the Archbishop tolerate this? They had entered his property and were measuring his land without prior intimation or permission. He at once guessed that there was some foul play behind this.

The one-man army did not hesitate. He pulled out his stout cane from under his bed, the same cane that he had used so painfully on his own flesh, and occasionally to chastise mildly, an erring deacon, or a lazy student. He sprang out of his room, brandishing his cane, and flew towards them like some avenging angel. "How dare you enter my property without my permission. Get out at once," he roared.

The revenue officer found it hard to face the furious Archbishop, so he looked away and muttered, "We are obeying the Diwan's order."

"Is that so? Then this is my order. In future you will not step into my grounds without my permission."

Not even the armed police said anything. Though they looked

stern and unyielding they had a great respect for the Archbishop and did not want to cross him. They were fully aware that if they did cross him he would see to it that they were squashed thoroughly. Let the Diwan do his worst, they thought as they stood quietly.

Shanmukham approached him and said calmly, "There are plans to start some new project here. We will measure the land and offer Your Grace the best price possible."

The Archbishop's glance almost annihilated Shanmukham as he roared out his response, "This is not a fish market to haggle over prices. I have no right to bargain over this land as it belongs to the Pope in Rome. I cannot say anything to you now without getting the Pope's permission in writing."

The police and revenue officers thought it was wiser to leave without delay. They pulled up their posts and rolled up their chains and went on their way.

He stopped Shanmukham as the latter followed his colleagues to tell him sternly, "Tell Sir C.P. that the word 'fear' never occurs in the dictionary of Mar Ivanios."

The Archbishop returned to his rooms feeling very much as he used to, when he used to chase away the wild pigs from ruining his crops in Bethany.

But he still felt unhappy over the whole situation and sought for something to divert his mind. He sent for Ramban Joseph Pulikkottil who was working in the Tiruvalla Diocese. Mar Theophilus was in charge there and Ramban Pulikkottil worked as his assistant. He had come to Trivandrum on some work.

The Ramban was a very pleasant person and a close friend of the Archbishop. "Have you no jokes to share with me?" he asked.

The Ramban immediately proceeded to tell him about his amusing experiences, which had the Archbishop laughing. In fact the other priests also gathered round to hear his tales. They had a lot of fun that evening and it was only at dinner time that the mood changed. They heard that Vattasseril Mar Dionysius was on his death bed.

At once the Archbishop set out for Kottayam with Ramban Philipose of Chepad and it was midnight when they reached the Old Seminary in Kottayam.

Mar Ivanios went in and stood by the bedside of his dying teacher. Mar Dionysius was half asleep. All around him were the

Jacobite Bishops and priests. Something tugged at his heart when he saw his teacher lying so weak and still.

His aged mind must have long ago been numbed by the unending quarrels within the Jacobite Church, thought Mar Ivanios. Even in his old age he had to go to court. And now the tired old warrior, that fearless fighter, could no longer move even a limb.

Mar Ivanios sat by his side and called him gently. "Valia Thirumeni."

His eyes opened slowly. "Hmm—?"

"It is I, —— Mar Ivanios."

There were tears in the half-opened eyes. His lips moved as if he wanted to say something. But his dry lips only trembled and did not say anything.

Mar Ivanios remembered a couple of things his teacher had often said of him in the past. "If there is one person who I can trust and love, it is Father Panikar."

And when he had become a bishop, Mar Dionysius had often said, "There is no one in the whole world that I have loved or trusted more. I trust him more than I would trust the Catholicos and love him more than I have ever loved anyone."

Quite often he was indifferent when he had heard these compliments in those long ago days, but now he would give anything to have those old lips say the same things about him. Would those lips be able to say them, though? And would he be able to mean them anymore? Or were those lips trembling to condemn him for his supposed treachery?

However, he still pleaded with a beating heart, "Will Your Grace bless me?"

Valia Thirumeni's right hand lifted a little. Mar Ivanios knelt on the floor beside him and caught the right hand in his own and kissed it and thus received his blessing.

He then got up and looked at everyone standing there. His old friend Father Joseph Valakuzhy was there, but today he was Mar Severios, Metropolitan of the Niranom Diocese.

Ramban Philipose of Cheppad was to have been consecrated as Metropolitan of Niranom, but since that could not take place, Father Valakuzhy had been consecrated instead and put in charge of Niranom. He was the right person to squash plans that others might have to join

the new Catholic Church. He had proved it, too, when K.V.Chacko passed away. Mar Severios had refused to allow his body to be buried by the Catholics, even though Chacko had joined the Catholic Church.

He had been consecrated the previous year, and since then he had prevented everyone who had showed a leaning to the Catholic Church from joining it. In fact, that seems to have been his main mission. He had been a favourite student of Mar Ivanios but now he did not care to acknowledge his presence. Neither did the other Jacobite priests or Bishops who were in the room care to do so, either. How lovingly had they called him M.A. Achen! How they had worshipped him as Metropolitan of Bethany, and how they had sung his praises! Now they turned away from him like devils who had seen the cross.

Yet Mar Ivanios approached them. He first went up to Mar Severios.

“Well, are you angry with me?”

“Yes, I am angry, but not with you personally. I am angry because you forsook the Jacobite Church.”

“I do not want to argue with you now, but I would like you to recall your Saturday prayers, a certain statement regarding Simon the Apostle.”

Mar Severios did not answer.

“Come on, tell me. I want to hear it from your lips,” urged the Archbishop

“I, Simon, who am the leader among the Apostles, have been established on the rock. Therefore I will have no fear.”

“Is it not absurd to keep repeating this prayer and refuse to accept Simon’s successor, the Pope? I am asking you for the last time to consider this well and try to see the truth before it is too late.”

But Mar Severios was not willing to listen and said stubbornly, “I am not prepared to go against the Jacobite Church that nurtured me and elevated me to this station in life.”

“I have nothing more to say. Let experience be your guide,” said Mar Ivanios as he left the room.

It was very dark but he set out on his return journey all the same. As they drove along he suddenly remembered that Mar Theophilus was ill and had been so for a few days now. So he directed

the driver to go to Tiruvalla.

Dawn was breaking when the car stopped in front of the Bishop's Palace in Tiruvalla. As soon as they heard of the Archbishop's arrival everyone made haste to hurry out of bed. Even the young deacons studying in the Seminary of The Infant Jesus hurried out to welcome him.

They all loved to listen to his conversation, so lively and interesting it was. First he inquired about the younger Bishop's health, just like a father inquiring about his son.

"Every year I rest for a short period in the Nalanchira monastery after a session of 'Pizhichil'.² From now onwards we shall undergo it together."

Then turning to the others Mar Ivanios asked, "What progress have you made in our efforts to draw people to the Catholic Church? Are there any problems?"

"Everything is going well, Your grace," answered Father Geevarghese, who was secretary to Mar Theophilus. "But we had a little problem the other day."

"Oh! Would you like to talk about it?"

"The other day there was a death. A person who had joined us had passed away. We were about to bury him when the local population objected. A pulaya came running up and threw himself into the grave saying that the dead cannot be buried there."

"And then what happened?" asked the Ramban of Cheppad eagerly.

"No matter what we said the fellow would not budge. Then one of our priests decided that enough was enough and fetched a spade and started filling the grave, 'I am going to bury this fellow alive.' At once the fellow sprang up and got out of the grave and ran away. The funeral went off beautifully afterwards."

'Everyone burst out laughing at the tale.

After that Mar Ivanios gave them some instructions. "Make sure that you initiate a Legion of Mary in every one of our parishes."

He believed a society in praise of Mary would be beneficial to every parish. He had learned about this when he had attended the congress in Dublin.

2 Pizhichil : an ayurvedic treatment

Before leaving for Trivandrum Mar Ivanios asked for some copies of certain books to be sent to him for distribution. Mar Theophilus had translated 'The Imitation Of Christ' into Malayalam, and had also written another book called 'The Way of the Cross.'

"I have also translated some of the hymns of the Passion Week from Syriac into Malayalam and have had them printed in book form. Your Grace," said Mar Theophilus from his bed.

"That's good. I'd like copies of that also. Lent is approaching." The deacons went out and brought the books and put them into the car.

By this time Deacon Paul had brought hot coffee and ripe bananas. Deacon Paul was from Kunnankulam from the Thekekara family and was a close relative of Ramban Joseph Pulikkotil. He would be ordained the following year by Mar Theophilus. It would be his first ordination.

Mar Ivanios picked up three bananas and gave one to the driver, and one to the Ramban and ate one himself. The others waited for the Bishop's blessing.

Chapter 43

“Experience will teach you and bring you to the truth.”

Mar Severios could not forget these words that Mar Ivanios had said as he left the Old Seminary. As the days went by they seemed to resound in his ears giving him no peace of mind at all. Even as he conducted meetings to turn people away with any lingering thoughts of joining the Catholic Church, these words rang in his mind.

It was no ordinary Bishop who said this. Mar Ivanios was a great scholar, so his words could not be brushed aside. From that day onwards Mar Severios began to study harder. He studied all the old records related to his Church. He followed it up with the decisions taken at the Synod of Chalcedon. At the same time he realized that Eviticus's arguments were ridiculous. And then he saw the mistakes that his Church had made over the years.

He prayed hard before opening his Bible. The Book opened to Luke chapter eleven verse twenty-three, “He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters.”

An idea began to take root in his mind. He would join the Catholic Church.

He gave his own car to the Jacobite Church and sent for Melamparambil Oommachen's car as he was aware that Oommachen had a strong leaning towards the new Catholic group. He took nothing with him, but the clothes he was wearing and his Communion box when he left for Trivandrum.

Mar Ivanios was in the monastery at Nalanchira, undergoing an enforced rest period after the annual Ayurvedic treatment. Mar Theophilus was to have joined him for the same treatment, but had to give up the idea as he could not even stand up without help. He was wasting away with some disease for which there was no treatment. He was even beginning to lose his memory and often talked at random about totally unconnected things.

It was a terrible misfortune that fell upon the Tiruvalla diocese. It had been built up and nurtured so well, but now it had fallen on bad days. So many mission centres and churches had come up but the architect of them all was laid low.

Mar Ivanios was supposed to be resting but that was only physically. His mind was not at rest. He surrendered all his problems to God and prayed hard they would be solved. “Father, please do not let the Tiruvalla Diocese be orphaned,” he prayed.

“Look who has come to meet Your Grace,” said Chackochen, his Manager, with secret satisfaction.

He did not know who had come to meet him but he proceeded to his drawing room, and found no one there.

Mar Ivanios looked questioningly at Chackochen.

Chackochen pointed to someone outside. “He will not come in without Your Grace’s permission. He is outside waiting for you.”

Mar Ivanios could not believe his eyes. The sight was so unexpected. The man who had sworn to crush all his efforts at bringing people to the fold. The man who had forgotten all old ties and had gone about the countryside preaching against him—his old student. There on the lawn, under the trees stood Mar Severios.

Mar Ivanios held out both his arms wide as he ran outside and hugged him close. He could hear Chackochen’s loud exclamations of welcome behind him.

“How are you, my brother?” asked Mar Ivanios lovingly.

“I have come to Your Grace for peace of mind. I was travelling the wrong path I know now, so I have come here. Your Grace must accept me here.”

“I have never forsaken you. But come in. Have you had something to eat? If not come. Come and have a bite. We can talk afterwards.”

“No, Your Grace, I will fast until Your Grace accepts me into the fold.”

“Even when you worked against me, I was sure of one thing. Like Saul you would return to the fold. God is so merciful. Else would you have come at this difficult time?”

Mar Severios did not understand and it showed on his face.

“Is there some way I can help Your Grace out of some difficulty? What could have possibly happened?”

“Mar Theophilus has retired from his diocese on account of his illness.”

When he heard about Mar Theophilus, Mar Severios was very sad.

“I had heard he was ill and I wanted to go and see him, but I could not. Your Grace, I must join the Catholic Church and then I can go and see him.”

Who would not want to see that innocent face? Who would not make haste to go and hear his beautiful voice?

They went straight to the monastery in Pattom where the monks welcomed him.

When they heard of the decision Mar Severios had taken they were all very happy. The priests welcomed him with lit candles. Many from the Syro-Malabar group were meeting Mar Severios for the first time.

As they went to the chapel Mar Ivanios asked if they had recognized their visitor. “Yes,” said Father Mathew Pothanamuzhi, first Rector of the St Aloysius Minor Seminary. “He is Mar Severios.”

Mar Ivanios smiled and said, “Yes, you may call him so, but there is another name more appropriate. The New Saul.”

They looked at the man who had worked so hard against them. When they saw his happiness they recalled Mar Ivanios beating his breast and sobbing as he prayed for the return of the prodigal.

In the chapel Mar Severios knelt in front of the Archbishop and took his vows which made him a Bishop of the Catholic Church. Chacko Kilileth signed the document as witness.

When they had returned to the monastery Mar Severios asked for a pen and paper.

“Why?” asked Mar Ivanios. “Are you going to write epistles like Paul?” Everyone laughed at this sally. The repentant Saul had written the epistles after his conversion.

When the laughter died down, Mar Severios said, “Officially I am still Bishop of the Niranom Diocese. I have given it up only in my mind. I must write them a letter resigning my post.”

Mar Ivanios took him into his room and gave him pen and paper. The resignation letter was written and sealed. Then Mar Ivanios opened his drawer and pulled out a letter and gave it to Mar Severios.

“I have preserved this letter for seven years. Do you know who wrote this?”

Mar Severios looked closely at the letter. Strange! It was his own handwriting. But why should it have been so carefully preserved for seven years? He ran a quick eye over it.

“——our Lord fasted in the desert for forty days. Then the devil tempted Him with worldly gifts but Our Lord rejected them out of hand and sent the devil packing.

“Your Grace fasted and prayed in Mundan Mala and when the devil in the shape of the Roman Catholic Church tempted you with worldly goods, Your Grace fell —”

It was a letter he had written to Mar Ivanios, mocking him when the latter had joined the Catholic Church. Tears filled his eyes and flowed down his face as he read the letter. He folded his hands together and sobbed as he begged for forgiveness.

Mar Ivanios comforted him. “Never mind, Mar Severios, today I am doubly happy.”

The resignation letter had to be sent to the Catholicos, and it so happened he was in Trivandrum that day, in the St. George Jacobite Church in Palayam. He did not want to give it to him in person, but thought it would be better if he sent it through someone else. Father Puthenveetil of Thumpamon agreed to be the messenger and took it to the Catholicos.

Those who were with the Catholicos were stunned. They sprang up furiously determined to find him.

Mar Ivanios and Mar Severios and Chacko Kilileth got into the car to go to Tiruvalla. The Jacobites saw them and gave chase in another car. Geevarghese the driver looked questioningly at Mar Ivanios. “Turn the car round and go to Cape Comorin,” ordered Mar Ivanios.

Somewhere near the Cape, Mar Ivanios had bought some land on a hill, with a good-sized house where they could take shelter and hide from their enemies. Geevarghese took to the bylanes and drove fast, all the time watching to see whether their enemies were following them or not.

They travelled via Marthandam where Father Joseph Kuzhinjalil ran a mission house. With his arrival there the Nadar community had joined the new Church in droves. He himself belonged to the Syro-Malabar group but he worked so unselfishly that the southern area was fast becoming a stronghold of the Catholics. He hailed from Pravithanam and had become a priest in the Changanacherry diocese and after a year had joined the Syrian Catholic Church attracted by Mar Ivanios.

Mar Ivanios wanted to stop at his Mission house and tell him something, but he thought better of it and decided to go ahead. Suppose there were enemies there also?

They reached Cape Comorin by night. Mar Ivanios and Mar Severios went into the house while Chackochen and Geevarghese, the driver walked toward the land's end.

It was a beautiful place. From the shore one could see three seas merging into one another. No matter how often they saw it they never tired of it. They could also see the big rock on which Swami Vivekananda had sat in meditation.

They sat for a while before moving onward discussing Church matters. Suddenly a black car raced past them and stopped a few feet away in front of them. Geevarghese and Chackochen glanced casually at the car and realized that it was the same car that they had seen in Pattom.

The car doors were thrust open roughly and four or five well-built men sprang out looking up and down the road as if searching for someone. They did not notice Geevarghese and Chackochen as it was dark and the two took care to stay out of sight. They, however, saw the roughnecks go into a small shop and make inquiries.

"Have you seen a couple of bishops go this way?" they asked.

"No, I haven't. I haven't seen anyone."

Which was true for the Archbishop's car had turned right into another road well before this shop.

"We are not going to allow the bishop we consecrated to go and rule in the Catholic Church," said one of them.

"We'll smash that car if we have to and take Mar Severios back with us. If the Bishop of Bethany objects, do not wait to think twice. Just do away with him," said another ruffian.

Geevarghese and Chackochen heard the threats and shuddered, and then crept quietly away to the bungalow where the two Bishops had taken refuge.

"Your Grace, those men have followed us here," said Chackochen to Mar Ivanios panting with the exertion of running. "They have come prepared to kill. We have to escape from here as soon as we can."

"In that case we shall go to Madras. I have a lot of work there also," said Mar Ivanios after some thought.

They set out on their way, and stayed in Madras until they felt safe enough to return to Trivandrum.

They found that other problems had come up which were worse than their earlier problems. There were obstacles in the way of the new Church, which were suffocating it. And it was all instigated by Sir C.P. Ramaswamy Aiyer who had turned round to take revenge like a wounded cobra. He was even coercing the young Maharajah to toe his line.

Harassment of the Christians took the form of restrictions that were unreasonable, spiteful and illogical. There were restrictions on public worship and even burial of the dead. One can imagine the hardship they caused when one remembers the lack of transport in those days and the tropical heat.

The priests were much troubled, but the Archbishop comforted them.

“Why are you so frightened? Only those who look downwards are frightened. Why don’t you look up to Heaven for help?”

His listeners at once remembered the psalm that began, “I will lift up mine eyes to the hills—”

Mar Ivanios then proceeded to write an article, had it printed and copies sent out to the various parishes. Somehow he had to lift their depressed spirits. He wrote, “Christians are not the only people living in this country. There are Hindus also and they have unlimited liberty to carry out their rites. They can bury their dead or cremate them without prior permission. They can conduct festivals and fairs. Only Christians seem to have no rights whatsoever. We seem to be suffering the same sad fate that the Israelites suffered in Egypt when centuries ago, the Pharaoh separated his people into two groups. This state of affairs will have to stop.”

The Archbishop’s article appeared in the papers and this caused a split in the reading public. One group alleged that Mar Ivanios was an enemy of the Hindus, and the other group said he was a just man speaking up for the minorities.

In the midst of this controversy a letter from the British Parliament, obviously a stricture, was sent to the Palace raising certain issues.

“It is reported that in the native state of Travancore in India the Christians are being harassed in the name of religion. We would like

to know the truth of this immediately.”

That was an unexpected slap in the face for the Diwan.

The Maharajah did not know what answer he could give.

This provoked further arguments in the papers. There were many papers to support the Diwan, and they accused Mar Ivanios for having made the complaint. Not without reason. Lord Fitzallen who raised this issue in Parliament was a great friend of Mar Ivanios. They had first met in London when Lord Fitzallen had presided over a reception to the Bishop and then had maintained the friendship through letters.

Soon editorials based on this controversy appeared in the various newspapers. ‘The Services’ wrote, “The Bishop who caused this accusation to be raised against the Maharajah should be jailed immediately.”

How could ‘The Malayala Manorama’ keep quiet at this?

Old animosities were forgotten as the Manorama spoke up for the Archbishop. He was projected as the soldier who fought for the rights of all the Christians.

“What is wrong if the Archbishop presented the woes of the Christians in the British Parliament,?” the editorial asked.

The Archbishop read all that was written for and against him in the papers but made no response at all. Like a good man he read them and put them out of his mind.

When the arguments in the papers increased the journalists decided to approach the Archbishop for his statement. They wanted to get at the truth.

When the journalists arrived at his Palace they said, “At least tell us what is at the bottom of all this controversy. Was it your Grace who approached the British Parliament?”

The Archbishop gave each one of them copies of the letter he had written to the government officers concerned. With a smile he added, “The Travancore government has harmed me a lot. All the twenty-six letters I wrote them requesting permission to build churches have been turned down. I have merely written to Sir C.P. asking him to re-consider my case. I have not had any desire to create any political controversies, nor have I written to anyone about my complaint.”

The truthful ring of his words impressed the journalists and they took down his words.

The Archbishop had a word of advice for them. "You must write only the truth. Look at this situation. Without any basis for it a seeming political controversy has been raised and there have been arguments pro and against it in the papers. If Hindus are allowed to build temples and worship here, and they are allowed to bury or cremate their dead, without prior permission, the same rights should be granted to the Muslims and the Christians. That is all that I have asked for."

Before leaving the journalists told the Archbishop that an interview with the Diwan would be published alongside of the interview with him. "We are not sure if it was intentional or not, but we did learn a little bit of his attitude to Your Grace."

"Oh! And what did he say?"

"If there was one person he feared in Travancore it was Your Grace."

The Archbishop burst out laughing. "And what was it that made him say so?"

"He admitted that you were the only clever and influential statesman in the State."

Chapter 44

“Shall we start another convent?” asked Father Joseph Kuzhinjalil, who had been responsible for the addition of nearly four thousand people to the Christian fold. And in just four short years. When such a dedicated man suggested something it could not be brushed aside very easily.

“Some girls from the Syro-Malabar group have come here anxious to take the veil. More girls are bound to follow their lead. Why not start a new order for them in Marthandam?”

Not everyone was approving. “We do have the Order of nuns started in Bethany by the Archbishop. Why do we need another order?”

But the Archbishop gave the matter some thought before pronouncing his approval. “That is very necessary, Father. It will be a good bridge between the Syro-Malabar group and ours. I suggest you make all the necessary arrangements for it.”

“Some girls from Pala have arrived prepared to dedicate their lives to the Lord. But I am finding it difficult to give them the training required.”

“I can make arrangements for that. I shall transfer Mother Basim from Nalanchira to Marthandam.”

Mother Basim was a relative of Mother Hooba of the Tiruvalla diocese. She was the eldest daughter of Daniel of the Ponvanibhom family in Kayamkulam and had taken her vows eight years ago.

And that was how the Daughters of Mary was born.

Slight differences were made to the rules and regulations of the Franciscan order and adapted to Indian needs. The nuns bore the initials D.M. after their names.

The teething troubles of the new Church were decreasing day by day. It was now full grown. No one could ignore it anymore as the service they did for the community was so impressive. The only problem that still loomed ahead was Sir C.P.’s vengeful nature. He was furious that the Archbishop had not fallen into his trap. He could not bear the thought that anyone could best him in any way in Travancore.

He liked to be known at large as superior even to the Maharajah of Travancore.

It became apparent to everyone that but for the Diwan's animosity the Church would have grown even faster than it had. Many advised the Archbishop to make a move to conciliate the Diwan. His best friend Advocate Philipose even spoke to him about it.

"Your Grace will have to make the first move to clear the air between you and the Diwan."

The Archbishop had nothing against the Diwan but he did not like his crookedness. If that was going to prevent the growth of the Church, he would still oppose it tooth and nail until his last breath.

But the pressure against such a decision was growing. Finally, Mar Ivanios agreed to make the first move. But how? There would have to be an occasion for it.

Then an idea dawned on him. That year the Diwan would be celebrating his sixtieth birthday, a milestone in the life of any Indian. Why not hold a grand reception in his honour?

"Good idea!" said Advocate Philipose.

"And we shall also inaugurate the St. Mary's School in Pattom that day."

Seven hundred students had already been enrolled in the school. All classes from class I to the Matriculation would start on the day of inauguration itself. Such a thing had never happened before in the history of the state.

Sir C.P. accepted the invitation and came to the function. All the invitees were seated in the Palace grounds—bishops, priests, judges, and other people. The Administrator of the Tiruvalla Diocese, Mar Severios was also present.

Sir C.P.'s speech that day was a thundering good one. He began by talking of the Roman Catholic Church and its greatness and proceeded to talk of the relationship between the royal family and the Church. That led him to talk about the Archbishop. The audience was stunned to hear him use such glowing terms for their Archbishop. He ended his speech by saying, "Mar Ivanios is the maker of Pattom."

Sir C.P. came and went in a blaze of happiness. Before leaving he kissed the hand of the Archbishop and said, "From now on we shall be friends. Please do not hesitate to ask me whatever help you want."

Was it a lion acknowledging the superiority of the elephant or was it a genuine desire for friendship?

Mar Ivanios lost no time looking out for ways to gain as much as he could from the Diwan. He was determined to get as much as he could for his Church and for his personal needs.

The Archbishop was thinking of it when he walked into his office one day. He stood for a while watching the gnarled hands of his clerk busy picking out the letters of the keyboard, then called out to him. At once the hands were stilled, and the clerk rose from his seat.

"Please do not come to this office for work from tomorrow," the Archbishop said.

The man could not believe his ears. He had never expected the Archbishop to speak so to him. Darkness filled his eyes and he thought he would faint. He was the sole support of a family of five or six members. What would he do now? Where would he find another job?

"Your Grace, I have not knowingly committed any error or done any wrong ——" he began with a sob in his voice.

"Who said you had done something wrong?"

"If Your Grace sacks me my family will starve," pleaded the man.

"I am aware of your needs, that is why I asked you not to come here to work any more."

The clerk could not understand what was happening and stood dumbfounded.

"I am going to arrange a government job for you," explained Mar Ivanios. "Go and see the Diwan with the letter I shall give you."

The man burst out crying. He bent low and touched the Archbishop's feet in gratitude.

"I have a lot of work to finish here, Your Grace. If I leave here tomorrow the work will pile up."

"Just tell me what has to be done and I shall do it. You go and meet Sir C.P. tomorrow."

He would have done a sweeper's job if the Archbishop had ordered him to. He did not know how to express his gratitude, so waited quietly for the all-important letter.

Mar Ivanios handed him a letter of recommendation and blessed the man.

Then the Archbishop sat down in front of the pile of files. He had two deacons to help him. Deacon Jose Mathews of Kudamaloor, and Deacon Kurien of Elanjimattom. Their classmates, Deacons Kelamparambil and Thykkattusherry were engaged in other work in the Bishop's Palace. All four of them were Deacons of the Malabar rites, and would be ordained priests in another two years time.

They worked all night to clear the workload and were very tired by four o'clock in the morning. But they were startled out of their sleepiness by the sound of a car coming to a halt at the entrance of the Palace. The Archbishop himself opened the door, and was stunned by his visitor.

It was His Grace Mar Dioscorus, sole Bishop of the Jacobite Knanaya group. For the last ten years he had been living in Chingavanam near Changanacherry.

They both went into the drawing room and sat down to chat. With the innocent smile of a child, Mar Dioscorus said, "I do not find any room or possibility for spiritual growth in the Jacobite Church. So I have come prepared to join the Catholic Church."

Happiness grew within him as the Archbishop said, "God is indeed blessing our Church. As the Church grows, more and more people are coming forward to take on the added responsibilities. Surely God is working for us."

Mar Dioscorus humbly replied, "I do not want any responsibilities, Your Grace. I want to live the life of a monk in one of the Bethany monasteries."

"If that is what you want then you can stay in the Thirumoolapuram monastery."

Chapter 45

“That Chettiar won’t sell us the land, Your Grace. We have asked him for it many times.” Chacko Kilileth and Mathai *Saar* were full of complaints against the Chettiar who would not sell them the land they had coveted.

Mar Ivanios was in the throes of writing a suitable text for the new priests who would have to learn much to carry out all the rituals connected with the Sacraments. It would be especially useful to the young priests from the Syro-Malabar Church.

When he heard that the property was not for sale the Archbishop sat up rather upset. It was his lifelong dream to open a good college, and if he could accomplish that in Trivandrum it would be just wonderful. Recently he had heard that a good-sized piece of land was up for sale in Nalanchira and that it belonged to a Chettiar in Devkottai.

Chackochen and Mathai *Saar* had gone to meet him in person and had been forced to come away disappointed.

“What did he say?” asked Mar Ivanios.

“He has refused to sell it for the price we offered, five rupees per cent. It seems someone else has offered more than that.”

“You said there were two hundred acres for sale. Even if he did agree to our price it would still amount to a hundred thousand rupees. Where would we obtain that kind of money?”

The Second World War was going on and times had become very difficult. Money was tight and one had to scrounge to buy even the weekly rations. He had to borrow a hundred rupees to send to the convent in Nangiarkulangara so that they could buy a cow and its feed. Would that suffice, he had wondered?

The expenses connected with the education of the priests and deacons were even worse. It was hard to find the money but how could he not educate an extremely intelligent young man like Varghese Thangalathil of Kalloopara. No matter what it cost them such young men would have to be encouraged. He had become Benedict O.I.C after his ordination and had gone to the Papal Seminary in Kandy in Ceylon for his higher education. He had only recently completed his education and returned to Pattom.

Mar Ivanios called Father Benedict O.I.C. to him. "You must have suffered a lot because of the war," he asked.

Father Benedict was very tactful in his reply. "Lord Mountbatten, Supreme Commander of the Forces was stationed in Kandy near our Seminary, so all enemy eyes were trained on us."

"You must have endured a lot of starvation," repeated the Archbishop in a voice that was gentle enough to melt a stone.

Tears glistened in Father Benedict's eyes but he said with a smile, "There were more soldiers stationed there than anywhere else. So naturally all the available food went to them."

"Never mind, Father," said the Archbishop consoling him. "Unless the ore passes through fire it is not refined into pure gold."

Then turning to Chackochen he said, "Let's go and see the Chettiar once more. Ask Father Mattathil to see how much money he can scrounge and, maybe we can offer that as an advance, if he agrees. Ask the driver to bring the car around. We shall go out now."

The brown-coloured Buick car soon reached Nalanchira. Like the seven hills of Rome, the land was spread over seven hills. It was thickly forested land with plenty of good trees, which could be cut down and used for the college building.

The Archbishop was pleased with the land and decided to go and meet the Chettiar right away. The Chettiar, a stern looking man dressed in formal western clothes was standing by his car when they reached his house.

He greeted the Archbishop in English. His own mother tongue was Tamil and it is possible that he did not know Malayalam. But that was not why he used the English language. He used it because he was very fond of the English language. The Archbishop was aware of that, so he too used the English language to converse with the Chettiar. The Chettiar was so impressed with the Archbishop's fluency in the language that he seemed to have been entrapped by it and found himself saying, "Yes—yes- —yes," to everything the Archbishop said.

All the same the Chettiar raised a feeble protest, "If you open a college here in these wilds won't the people laugh at you?"

"The wilds of today become the cities of tomorrow, sir. Besides, isn't it better to have an educational institution in a peaceful area far away from the crowds of a city?"

But the Chettiar was not quite satisfied. "You do not have many of your own Church people here, do you? So if you start a college here will it be a success?"

"Well, let me tell you one of my experiences so far. Some time ago we started a school in Nangiarkulangara. These same reasons were trotted out to laugh at us. But today we have had the managers of the other schools there begging us not to increase our seats there, else they would have to close down their schools," explained the Archbishop.

The Chettiar pondered a bit before saying, "Well, since Your Grace wants to use this land for a laudable purpose I shall sell it to you for the price you have quoted, five rupees per cent."

No one expected to conclude matters so quickly and satisfactorily.

The land was just as he had visualized in his mind. A magnificent college should come up there. They would offer courses that no college in Malankara had offered before. The courses would be useful for the students to carve out a career for themselves. Commerce was not offered by any college so commerce would be taught here. The Co-operative Movement was another subject that would be introduced in his college.

Nowhere in India was the Philosophy of Education taught, but he would combine it with Psychology and offer a course in Syriac to his students. He would name his college, the Bethany College. The Bethany institutions were all service oriented and this college would epitomize all their ideals. With all these plans in mind he set about raising the required amount and bought the land.

However, the blue skies of his dreams were soon clouded over. Strange rumours were heard but the Archbishop dismissed them as creations of his jealous enemies. But they turned out to be true.

It appeared that the royal family wished to buy the land bought for the college for their own needs. They had come and seen the land and now all that remained was to have the land measured and bought. And that would take place the next day.

The Archbishop's mind was like a stormy sea. The anger on his face was terrible. He walked up and down his garden trying to find ways and means to overcome this problem.

The priests in his Palace served dinner and came out to tell him

so.

“You go ahead and have your dinner,” he told the priests without stopping his pacing. Usually they had dinner together, but today he had no mind for it.

“Hey, Father Kurien,” he called out. “Come here.”

A fair plump priest detached himself from the others and came and stood by the Archbishop. The latter took his arm for support and together they paced the garden. He had to somehow find a way out of this tangle.

Suddenly the Archbishop stopped and looked at his disciples huddled on the verandah. “Everyone get ready to go to Nalanchira at once,” he ordered. “We must put up a temporary shed tonight itself.”

The priests ran out and called their workers together. They carried with them bamboos and posts and their spades and hoes. Some carried portable gas lights and others carried lanterns and yet others had burning torches. They boldly went into the forested land in Nalanchira, inhabited by wild animals quite fearlessly and started their work. They worked hard all night and by morning they had a sizable temporary shelter for a few people to live in.

They had pulled down the signboard in front of the Bishop’s Palace and had brought it with them. This they now put up. The Archbishop’s House it proclaimed to everyone. A few priests and workmen at once moved into the house.

The next morning the surveyors arrived as expected. They were under the supervision of the Chief Secretary Dr. Kunjanpillay himself. The Diwan’s car followed the Secretary’s car and they slid to a halt in front of Mar Ivanios.

“I had imagined that you would stop harassing us, but I see that nothing is going to stop you,” the Archbishop said harshly.

The reception held in honour of the Diwan’s sixtieth birthday had not been to placate him. The Diwan’s speech had been translated into many languages and had been published in many lands. The translated version of it had been broadcast even over the Vatican radio, but it had not been enough to subdue him. The Archbishop had hoped that the evil in the Diwan would be suppressed. But if nothing was going to make a change in him then other means would have to be employed.

Sir C.P. heard the rebuke in the voice of the prelate, but that did

not affect him. He whispered a command to the surveyor and then turned to Mar Ivanios with a faint smile on his lips.

"I had no desire to annoy Your Grace again. I have not seen this land nor have I made any efforts to take this away."

The Archbishop was very harsh in his reply. "Then pray what is the meaning of this visitation?"

"The Maharajah wanted to set up a memorial to the late Prince Avittam Thirunal, his nephew. He wants to build a hospital for children in his memory. I was asked to find some suitable land for the purpose."

The Archbishop was aware of this sad story, but that was all he knew. All the rest of it was new to him.

"And of course the Diwan will not have heard of any suitable property other than mine."

Sir C.P. heard the sarcastic note in the Archbishop's voice but he still answered without any rancour.

"I knew about this property and Your Grace had already informed me about the proposed college and the Bishop's Palace to be built here. So I did not think of acquiring this land at all."

"Then what made the Maharajah and his kin come and inspect my land?"

"It is possible that some of Your Grace's enemies informed the Maharajah about this prime property. And the Maharajah must have thought of acquiring it for his purpose if Your Grace had no objection. That is why the surveyors were sent here by the Maharajah. I followed them as soon as I heard of it."

"Anyway I am not going to give up this land for it belongs not to me but to His Holiness the Pope. No one can acquire this without his permission."

"In that case the job of finding land suitable for a hospital falls on my head."

"This property so far away from human habitation is unfit for a hospital. You need land that has water and plenty of sunshine. Would you object if I showed you a hundred acres of such land?"

"Wonderful. That would ease my burden."

"Good. Then please get into the car," said the Archbishop laughing.

The Diwan and the surveyors and the Archbishop got into the

latter's Buick and the car was directed southwards. When they reached Kesavadaspuram they turned right and stopped when they reached Ulloor. The Archbishop and the others got out of the car and then he showed them some really good land eminently suitable for a hospital. Sir C.P. was really pleased and said, "This land is really most suitable for our purpose. We shall build a hospital here."

And that was how the land at Nalanchira was saved. A college would have to come up there without delay, but a huge amount of money would be required for the purpose. Where would they get it and how? While he pondered over the problem he got an invitation from Canada to speak at a function to be held in the capital city, Ottawa.

He had already received many invitations to the United States of America before this but it suddenly struck him that his monetary problem would be solved if he combined a visit to the two countries. Many wanted him to speak at their gatherings and what money he earned for giving these talks would go to his College Building Fund.

He decided he would go to America.

He was sitting in his room and looking through his collection of old coins one day. He planned to call on Truman, the US President while in that country. He was aware that Truman collected old coins, so he thought he would make a present of some of his rare old coins to Truman. Suddenly Ramban Philipose of Cheppad hurried in.

"I have not yet received Your Grace's article for the next issue of The Trumpet."

"That's right. And we are already half way through in Lent. So I shall write about Easter."

Mar Ivanios rang the little bell on his table.

A young priest entered. Father Joseph Vadakekoot was his personal secretary. He hailed from a small village called Kozhuvanal, near Pala.

"How much work have you completed today?"

Father Joseph had been asked to write replies to all the letters that came from America.

"Half the work is over."

"Then bring your scribbling pad and a pen and come and sit down."

The priest understood. Every month the Archbishop would write

an article for the Ramban's paper.

The Archbishop lay back in his chair with his eyes shut. He began to dictate an article about the Resurrection of Jesus Christ who sacrificed His life so that His people might live.

The priest had to write at furious speed to keep pace with the Archbishop's train of thought. As soon as he had finished the priest was ordered to read the article aloud.

As he read, Mar Ivanios filled in the gaps left by Father Joseph as he hurriedly took down his article. Before the Ramban could hurry off with the article the Archbishop reminded him not to allow The Trumpet to die away. "That is the mouthpiece of the Syrian Catholics, and as time goes on it has to be updated. It should turn out to be our trumpet."

"It is very popular in all our missions, Your Grace."

Mar Ivanios then turned to Father Vadakekoot. "Make all the arrangements necessary for a long journey. You will go with me."

Father Vadakekoot was extremely happy to hear this. He had been sent to Rome to study, now here he was going to America. What a great honour! To travel with such a great personality! What opportunities he would have, to meet great people!

Father Vadakekoot stood there lost in his dreams. But Mar Ivanios had turned back to selecting old coins to give away as a present.

Chapter 46

“The flight is at half-past one, Your Grace. If Your Grace does not leave now——,” said Father Vadakekoot over the heads of the many visitors who had come to say good-bye. The clock had already struck twelve.

The Archbishop sent for Chackochen at once. Chackochen, who was busy locking the suitcase prior to departure, hurried out.

“Make sure that you have the forest cleared from the Nalanchira hills. Get the necessary workmen for it. Give as much help as you can for the construction of the college.”

Father Seraphion was standing by the Archbishop. He had submitted the blueprints of the proposed college building much earlier, and the Archbishop had approved them.

“As soon as the land has been cleared start the construction. Mathai Saar will give you whatever help is required.”

All the monks and nuns had come to say farewell and they all stood around disconsolately. The Archbishop took time off to say a few words to each one personally.

The children from St. Mary’s school and the teachers lined the road on either side. Before leaving for the airport with his secretary the Archbishop went into the chapel and said a prayer. As he got into the car he lifted his cross and blessed the assembled crowd. Then the car slowly moved off but on the way it stopped to allow the Archbishop to go in to St Mary’s Church at Palayam. After all he was going to attend the Marian Congress primarily, so it was only fitting that he stopped for a word of prayer in the church dedicated to her.

The aeroplane to Bombay was already at the airport. There were large crowds waiting to see him off there, too. All of them were kneeling on the ground. The Archbishop blessed them all before he moved into the airport and into the airplane. In a few moments the flight had taken off.

It was a long, long journey to Ottawa. Father Thomas Nangachiveetil was waiting at the airport to receive him. He was the headmaster at St. Mary’s school but he had been sent to the States for higher education and was a student in Fordham University, New York.

Large crowds from all over the world had gathered there for the Marian Congress, and there the Archbishop celebrated Mass according to the Syrian rites, and followed it up with his sermon. They were all spiritually satisfying experiences.

After the sermon the Archbishop mingled with the crowds and he was complimented on the unusual aspect of his sermon. It was the first time that they had heard the Virgin Mary described as the second Heaven.

"The Virgin Mary is thus addressed only in the Antiochian order," he explained, and then proceeded to elaborate on the high place accorded to the Virgin in the eastern rites.

All this while the choir had been singing melodiously and the Archbishop was very much impressed. In fact he stopped talking for a while just so he could listen to the singers. "I should like to meet those nightingales," he said.

As the ushers led him to the choir, they explained that these five singers were sisters. "They are quintuplets actually. And all good singers."

With a beaming smile on his face he went forward to meet the singers. The quintuplets were seventeen-year-old white children. Dressed all in white with innocent smiles lighting up their faces they looked like angels.

"I have met a couple with twenty-seven children, but looking at you I feel happier than when I met them. Who do you have at home?"

"Papa and Mummy," they answered. "There are twelve of us children."

"Oh! So you are fourteen in all. Like Jesus and his Mother and the twelve disciples. I am sorry but I do not seem to have anything to give you," he said delving into his pocket. He came up with his rosary which he carried with him at all times.

"Keep this and use it when your family meets together for prayers."

Their blue eyes sparkled as each one of them stretched out a hand to receive it.

By this time Mayor Rousseau of Thrivers came up to invite the Archbishop to dinner. The first thing he noticed was the inscription over the doorway of the Mayor's house. "My country and my Church are what I love most."

The Archbishop preferred touring the countryside in stead of the urban areas. So the Mayor arranged to take him out to the villages and farms. He enjoyed walking through the fruit-laden orchards and tasting rare fruit. He also went to their market places and talked to many of the locals. He enjoyed their fairs and listened to their private woes.

One of the people he met there was a wealthy merchant. The merchant was anxious to learn about Malankara and his change to the Roman Catholic Church and the growth of his community.

He learned about the Archbishop's plans for building a college and the lack of funds for the same.

"I shall send you some steel girders for your college by ship. Your Grace must accept them and use them in your building."

Mar Ivanios thanked him warmly for the same.

He also visited a village where there were Indians living. Most of them were Punjabis. They received him with great warmth but they had a long tale of woe.

"We have been here for the last thirty years, about two hundred families, but we have not yet been accepted as citizens. So we cannot enjoy any of the benefits that people here enjoy. Your Grace must help us."

The Archbishop turned to Mayor Rousseau. "Please listen to their grievances. Why can't you accept them as citizens?"

The Mayor immediately took the necessary action to clear their applications for citizenship.

From there he went to New York. Cardinal Spellman of the world's largest Archdiocese, received him. A friend of his was also waiting with a car to take him to the UNO assembly. He had been specially invited by the authorities, there.

As the car sped through the streets of New York they came to an area where a large number of people had gathered. It looked like a convention of some sort. The streets were decorated, and there were many people on the roads. Policemen with walkie-talkies walked around diverting cars on to other routes.

The Archbishop asked for the car to be stopped.

Finding a small space suitable for parking the driver stopped the car. The Archbishop lowered the window and asked a passer-by what the occasion was.

An usher wearing the convention badge stopped to answer and must have been startled by the sight of the heavily bearded face with a saffron Masanapsa on his head. "It is a reception to the Irish Prime Minister," he answered.

"Who? De Valera?" exclaimed Mar Ivanios joyfully.

"The same."

"There on the third floor," said another helpfully, pointing to a building that seemed to touch the sky.

"That's wonderful. Do you suppose I could meet him?"

"I doubt if that will be possible. You see some political leaders are having a very serious discussion on certain issues, and I do not think he can be disturbed."

"That does not matter. Just see if you can give him this visiting card," said the Archbishop holding out his card. An usher accepted it with great surprise and read the name: Archbishop Mar Ivanios, Trivandrum, India.

The man took the card into the building and gave it to someone on the ground floor.

The Archbishop got out of the car and walked slowly towards the building. In his unusual dress he was naturally the cynosure of all eyes there, but he just smiled at them all and stood under the shade of a pine tree.

He was pretty sure that when De Valera saw the card he would send for him, no matter how busy he was. He had first met De Valera fifteen years ago when he had gone to Ireland to attend the Holy Eucharistic Congress and he had found him very friendly. He still remembered De Valera's words when he was leaving.

"If ever I come to India I will come to meet Your Grace first."

He could see the lift come down from the third floor through the glass panes of the door. It was De Valera himself who came down. The uncrowned King of Ireland.

He could not miss the Archbishop in his unusual dress in the crowd. He pushed his way through the crowds and the police that pressed about him and came up to the Archbishop and knelt down on the sun-heated road in front of him, and kissed his hand.

The journalists naturally came crowding round and cameras flashed capturing the incident for posterity. The crowd just stood numb with disbelief.

"I have wasted a little of your precious time I think," said the Archbishop apologetically.

"I am only sorry I cannot spend more time with Your Grace."

"That does not matter. I am on my way to the UNO. It was just luck that I was able to meet you."

They took leave of each other. The crowds were still staring at the Archbishop in disbelief. "Who was this Bishop? Where did he come from?" was the question on every lip.

It was now almost noon. The assembly was in session in the UNO. The Archbishop entered the building to the salute of the blue-capped security men of the UN.

There were many world leaders there in the hall. They were deep in discussion when the Archbishop entered. The Russian representative was pointing an accusing finger at the US representative as he argued vehemently. For a minute he stood in the doorway and listened to the topic. The subject under discussion was Czechoslovakia. Should he have come here at such a time, he wondered. But he had been invited. He walked into the rather noisy hall and immediately everyone fell silent. They all stood up to receive their guest not taking their eyes off him at all. The Archbishop walked through the ranks of world leaders with a smile on his face. Then he said to the other invitees there, "Carry on with your discussion. I should like to meet Mrs Vijayalakshmi Pandit."

India had achieved its freedom just a month ago but had already sent its representative to the UNO. She was the leader of the Indian representatives who had come there. The sister of the first Prime Minister of India, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru. She was also the Indian Ambassador to Russia.

The ushers there guided him to the room set aside for the representatives of India. Vijayalakshmi Pandit came there. A plump graceful woman. He had met her earlier, so was no stranger to her.

After they had greeted each other, the Archbishop said, "I should like you to do something for me."

"What is it?"

"India is now a free country. I would like to have a representative sent to the Vatican. I did write to Pandit Nehru after we got our freedom but I did not mention this matter. It would be much better if you spoke to him about it personally."

“What did Your Grace write to him about?”

“I wrote asking him that we become members of the British Commonwealth.”

“We are still discussing that issue in India. I shall certainly mention this matter regarding the Vatican to him.”

The United Nations assembly ended and the other Indian representatives came up to the Archbishop. As each leader came up to meet him cameras flashed taking pictures of the meeting. The Archbishop was able to converse with each one of them with ease. The journalists came crowding round him asking for a statement about the UNO.

They got a very serious reply. “Two very fierce wars have taken place. Its victory must not be seen as that of one side only. The victory of the allied forces was not to impose their might over the defeated. Their responsibility was to lead the human race through the right path.”

Chapter 47

The White House. He had been invited to dinner at the White House, but he also had a brief meeting with the President before that. A five-minute meeting as Harry Truman was exceedingly busy. After all he was the man who ordered the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and therefore was scheduled to hold several meetings with world leaders. A member of the President's staff came out and led the Archbishop into the Presidential drawing room. Harry Truman got up happily to receive him.

The Archbishop could see snow falling on the pine trees outside through the glass panes. It was extremely cold but inside the building it was warm.

"I've been wanting to meet Your Grace ever since I read about you in the papers and heard of you on the radio," said Truman.

There was hardly any time but the Archbishop managed to convey to the President his feelings about his country. "For many years my country was like a caged bird. Now it has been set free but we have not yet been able to fly. We need your help and co-operation for that."

He had brought with him the album of old coins. He took it now from his secretary and gave it to Truman. "Let this be a memento of our meeting," he said.

Truman opened the album and was pleasantly surprised. "How did Your Grace know I was interested in old coins?" he asked. "Actually it is more than a hobby for me, more like a craze, I would say."

He looked at each coin carefully with increasing pleasure. "Ah! I have never seen such tiny old silver coins. Where did Your Grace get all this?"

"Some years ago I had done a research in old coins and had collected many at that time. I picked out forty-eight of them for you, Mr. Truman."

"That is a coin for each one of our capitals in this country. Good. Good idea. Many thanks. But how do you take care of such tiny coins? One would not even know if it slipped through one's hands."

Mar Ivanios laughed as he replied. "They have been made small

so that thieves would find it difficult to find them and steal them. One can hide them in one's eyes you know."

The Archbishop took out two or three coins and tucked them deep under his top eyelid and then shut his eyes firmly and said, "We used to keep our money safe like this."

"Now I know Your Grace is a magician also," said Harry Truman laughing.

The Archbishop opened his eyes and pulled out the coins and put them back into the album.

"How did you manage without shedding a tear?" marvelled Truman's secretary.

Harry Truman was anxious to hear more about old coins. The Archbishop proceeded to tell him much out of his vast store of knowledge and Truman kept making notes of them and it ended with the Archbishop telling him of Malankara's old glory.

He spoke of Solomon's sailors coming to the shores of Malankara hundreds of years before Christ and how they had mined gold in Mavelikara, and how that gold had been used in building the temple in Jerusalem.

Harry Truman just could not get enough of all this. And that too in English that excelled the native speakers.

Mar Ivanios glanced at his watch and said, "I have taken more of your time than was allowed to me. More than an hour in fact."

"It passed away like a minute," said Truman. "I would like Your Grace to stay with me for a couple of days, if possible. I could learn so much."

"I am sorry, but I have to visit ever so many other places," said Mar Ivanios.

Dinner at the White House was even more enjoyable. Many guests had been invited and during the dinner a microphone was put in front of the Archbishop. Everyone was anxious to hear what he had to say.

"Indians are cleaner than you Americans," he began.

Everyone stared and some objected. "But that's not what we have heard."

The Archbishop was firm in his opinion. "What you have heard is wrong. Look, you use the dishes you have eaten from again, don't you? Well, we throw away our dishes after using them once," he

clarified.

“Not only in cleanliness but in wealth also you defeat us,” exclaimed one of them.

“Oh, we eat our food off plantain leaves,” said the Archbishop with a mischievous smile.

The whole White House shook with the laughter that followed.

The cold was just terrible. He had woollen coats but that was not enough. He also felt a terrible uneasiness and weakness all over his body. He still had many places to visit, but he could not travel. He was not quite sure what was wrong with him.

Mar Ivanios had become weak. When he heard about it Cardinal Spellman came to see him.

“You need rest. You need a holiday for a couple of weeks. I booked a room for you in the biggest hospital, in Providence, before coming to meet you,” said Cardinal Spellman.

The Archbishop was extremely tired but he smiled as he replied, “Thank you. I just cannot think of going to a hospital and doing nothing there. I should like Your Grace to do me a favour. Please send me a book in Hebrew and I shall spend time there in bed learning Hebrew.”

Learning Hebrew was one of his great desires as yet unfulfilled. Mainly because he did not have the time for it. He decided to learn the language while he was in hospital.

The Cardinal agreed. And so Mar Ivanios went to hospital with two priests, Father Vadakekoot and Father Nangachiveetil, to look after him. The doctors came one after the other to meet him.

When a specialist came to see him, Mar Ivanios said, “I am aware that man’s life is in God’s hands, but all the same, please tell me what is wrong with me.”

“Nothing wrong in the X’rays as far as I can see,” said the doctor with a laugh. “Your Grace is in absolute health considering your age. All the same Your Grace needs to rest. You should have your meals at regular intervals. You must sleep for eight hours every day. Some light exercise is a good idea.”

Father Nangachiveetil had carefully preserved all the newspapers which had carried news or articles about Mar Ivanios. He had not had time to show them before, but now the good Father brought them out one by one and gave it to the Archbishop to read with a little

explanation of his own.

"This is The Daily News with a vast circulation," he said handing the Archbishop a paper. Mar Ivanios lay in his bed and opened the paper. On the first page was a big photograph of him, with the caption, "The Most Photographed Person of the Year." It was followed by an article titled, "A Great Missionary from India."

There were many flattering articles in other papers. The Archbishop ran a casual eye over them all and then said to his secretary, "Write to Father Benedict immediately. By the time we finish our tour here he must join us here. We are going straight to Rome from here. Father Benedict should go to Rome with us. Send him whatever papers are necessary for it."

He was in hospital for five weeks. He thanked God that he had been given that much time to spend in prayer and studies, and was not unhappy about it.

He had barely reached his hotel when a group of obviously perturbed Indians came to meet him. "Mahatma Gandhi has been shot dead," they said.

"Oh, my God!" That was all that Mar Ivanios could say.

"He was going for his evening prayers," they elaborated. "A man named Godse shot him——with the gun he had concealed in his palms as he greeted him. Five bullets in his chest. 'Hey—Ram' he said as he fell dead at his murderer's feet."

Mar Ivanios did not say a word but stood still, staring into the distance with the tears rolling down his face. There was much to remember. He remembered going to the Ashram at Sabarmati, and meeting Gandhiji, talking about so many different things. As he stood mentally turning over the pages of his album of memories, some officials came to see him from Fordham University.

"We are holding a condolence meeting this evening to mourn the death of Mahatma Gandhi, and we would like you to be the main speaker, Your Grace."

He needed no time to prepare a talk on Gandhiji. He knew his life like an open book so he went to the condolence meeting and gave a most moving speech.

After the speech was over the journalists crowded round him and to them he said. "Gandhiji's great achievement was to put into practice Buddha's principles of non-violence. When I was planning

my monasteries I had gone to him and he had spoken to me about it.”

“So Mahatma Gandhi and Your grace were friends it appears.”

“While I was a professor in Calcutta I went and stayed at his Ashram for some time.”

“”What did Your Grace learn from Gandhiji?”

“I learned a lot about non-violence from him,” he said thoughtfully.

“Is that why Your Grace does not eat non-vegetarian food?”

“Not eating meat is only one side of non-violence. In our Indian tradition the cow is regarded as the foster mother, for we drink its milk when we are young. So we do not eat its flesh.”

His American tour was coming to an end. Now he had one more important mission. He had to go to the University of San Francisco in California. They were celebrating its ninety-third anniversary and he had been invited as Chief Guest. There was a special reason for it, too. He was to be awarded a Doctorate. When the subject of awarding it had come up for discussion they were unanimous in their decision that Mar Ivanios be given it.

It had been announced in all the papers so a very large crowd had gathered on the occasion. There were large crowds on the street outside. So when the car stopped and the Archbishop got out of the car the sea of people parted rather like the Red Sea did for Moses.

The Principal, a Jesuit priest, led him up to the dais, and then introduced him to the audience. Then said, “The Oxios that rose for you in Trivandrum is raised here again for Your Grace by this University as I confer upon Your Grace the Degree of Doctor of Law, by the authority vested in me by the State of California. “

The crowd applauded when the Archbishop rose up to respond. A beret with tassles hanging at one corner was placed on his head, and a rolled up scroll tied with red ribbons was placed in his hand. After that he began to speak. The function was followed by a variety entertainment through which the Archbishop sat attentively. In fact at one point he turned to the Principal and whispered, “I wish I were studying here in this University.”

“Your Grace is an ocean of learning,” said the Principal. “What more can Your Grace learn here? Even if Your Grace were to insist on being the Chancellor of this University it would be opposed, for this is small stuff for Your Grace.”

Chapter 48

It was a most unexpected visit. They had come all the way from Australia to invite him to the centenary celebrations of the Melbourne Diocese. They had planned a large scale celebration for it and were insistent that he attend.

“I beg of you to excuse me,” he pleaded. “I have to go to Rome at once,” and then told them his itinerary.

They were however, insistent. The Bishop of Melbourne got some others to persuade the Archbishop, which was how Cardinal Spellman also came to speak to him about it.

“Your friends are also going to the function. Fulton J. Sheene and DeValera and myself are going. It will be a big shame if Your Grace does not accompany us.”

What could he do? He sat and pondered over the problem.

He was very anxious to go over and meet the Pope once more. He had met the late Pope Pius XI on his last trip to Rome and he would have very much liked to meet the present Pope, Pius XII. He had met the present Pope on his last trip when the latter was Cardinal Patchelli.

He had also planned to take Father Benedict with him to Rome and introduce him to everyone. Father Benedict had passed out of the Seminary in Kandy and had joined St. Joseph’s college in Trichinopoly to do his M.A. He had informed him of his plans and Father Benedict was making all his plans to join the Archbishop in America.

The Bishop of Melbourne was so insistent that the Archbishop finally agreed and asked Father Vadakekoot to inform Father Benedict of the change of plans. “I have decided to go to Melbourne, so please wire Father Benedict not to come here.”

They set out on a Wednesday by plane. During the flight the pilot announced, “We are now crossing the International Date Line.”

This was a new experience for Mar Ivanios. He asked the others for more details about this Date Line. The famous writer Fulton J. Sheene explained this to him. “When we cross the International Date Line we will miss one day. That is, when we leave America on a Wednesday and arrive in Australia the next day it will be Friday.”

When he heard that the Archbishop was unhappy. “So I have lost a Thursday in my life. That’s just too bad.”

Even when he took part in the centenary celebrations this loss kept nagging him. Even when he returned to Trivandrum it remained in his mind like a small scratch on a smooth surface.

The airport was crowded over with his people. An extremely happy crowd. A deliriously happy crowd that rained flowers on him. He first drove to St. Mary’s in Palayam. Forgetting his illness and his travel weariness he celebrated Mass there. Then he went to his Palace in Pattom, where an overwhelming reception awaited him.

Journalists crowded round him asking for impressions of his journey. Father Vadakekoot had been sending detailed accounts of his journey in the United States and Ramban Philipose and Father Injakilody had been compiling them and publishing them in the Church magazine every month. But they wanted to know about his Australian trip, which had not been covered by Father Vadakekoot. It was the latter who met the journalists and spoke to them.

“We left Australia by ship. There was a severe storm at sea and we all thought we would drown. But God brought us to land safely.”

“How far did you travel by ship?” asked the journalists.

“Up to Colombo. That day we spent in the Papal Seminary in Kandy.”

After a short rest, the Archbishop came out for the reception and the journalists crowded round him, cameras flashing. They all wanted to hear what he had to say.

“I have had only one disappointment throughout the whole year.” The journalists listened eagerly to this wondering what was coming.

“I have lost a whole day in my life.”

They did not understand what he was saying and looked puzzled, so he showed them his diary. Every page was written over, except for one Thursday. That page was blank.

It was only after he had explained to them his loss that he settled down to the reception. There were many speakers there and among them was a poet. The great poet K.V.Simon’s nephew, or one could say his foster son.

He was a great admirer of the Archbishop though he belonged to the Mar Thoma Church, and he had been waiting for a chance to glorify the prelate. He had in fact come with a beautiful poem all

ready in his praise.

His name was announced over the microphone. "K.M. Varughese of Edayaramula. He kissed the Archbishop's hand before reciting his poem.

The public appreciated his poem greatly and when he came off the stage, the Archbishop called him over. "Excellent. You should also become a great poet like your uncle, K.V.Simon. You must try to complete what your uncle began. He wrote the book of Genesis in six thousand couplets. He did for the Christians what Kunjan Nambiar had done for the Hindus. Unfortunately your uncle was able to write only the Genesis. You must write the whole Bible in poetry for our people."

The land at Nalanchira had been cleared and a grand building had come up for a college. The iron girders, which had been sent from Canada, had been used in the building. The carpenters had almost completed their work. For months the sound of their hammer and chisel could be heard all over the seven hills, but now they were falling silent. The engineer-cum-priest had toiled night and day giving instructions and following it up and Chackochen and his office had much to do managing the finances. But it was all nearing completion.

The Archbishop wasted no time going over to see his college. Father Benedict who had returned from Trichinopoly with a Master's degree in Economics went with him. Father Benedict had in fact obtained the first rank from the Madras University for his M.A. degree. Everyone in the Bishop's Palace had been overjoyed at the news and the happiness was reflected on the Archbishop's face, too, as he walked with Father Benedict leaning on his arm for support.

Mar Ivanios stood looking at the building which was nearing completion, with a lot of satisfaction when Father Seraphion and a few other priests came up to him. It was Father Seraphion who spelled out what they had in mind. "We would like permission to change the name of the College," he said.

"Why? Isn't the name Bethany good enough for this college?" asked the Archbishop.

"All of us are of the opinion that the college should be named after Your Grace," he said. "Your Grace must give us permission for that."

“I have never had any desire to have anything in my name, but if this is what you would all like then I will not object.”

Then turning round to the other priests he said, “I have had this longing to start a good college ever since my M.D.Seminary days. And recently that desire was strengthened.”

“Is it because two of our students were denied admission in the S.B. College, Changanacherry?” asked Father Mattathil.

“Yes. But that was not their fault. We sent our students after the admissions had closed, and they could not have done anything without the permission of the University.”

“The Principal was exceedingly sorry he could not do what Your Grace asked,” said Father Mattathil who was a former member of the staff in S.B. College.

“Tell him not to worry about that. It does not really matter much, except that it was another spur to my ambitions.”

As he was talking he pulled out a typed sheet of paper and handed it over to Father Benedict. Father Benedict quickly opened the sheet and stood numb with surprise and the tears gathered in his eyes. Father Mattathil leaned over and read the letter for the benefit of the others there. Father Benedict had been appointed Principal of the new college.

Then Mar Ivanios delved into his pocket again and pulled out a gold pen and a small key which he put into the shaking hands of the young priest.

“I have bought you a new cycle which you will find back at the Palace, and this is the key for it. However, these things are not for Father Benedict.”

Looking at the dumbfounded expression on Father Benedict’s face, the Archbishop explained. “This is for the use of Father Benedict, the Principal, only.”

“Don’t use your cycle to come and meet me every now and then. It will wear out the tyres, you know.”

As they walked about, the prelate spoke of his dreams. “Our Lord has said that we must go out into the world and carry His message to all the peoples. I have built these educational institutions to put that into practice. I am sure you will carry out my dreams, Father.”

Father Seraphion had another plan up his sleeve. “Now that the

work on the college is almost complete, don't you think we should build a Bishop's Palace?"

Not without reason did the priest raise the issue. For the last eighteen years the Archbishop had been living in and working from a dilapidated old building.

"We do not need big buildings for our use, now. That can be done any time. Right now our need is to build mission centres and if we do not build them now it may never be built," said the Archbishop.

Naturally he was anxious to make sure that none of his plans would get stuck for want of funds. A Bishop's Palace could wait. There were so many other things to think of. So many needs.

Father Injakilody came with another need. Father Thomas Injakilody was a very good writer, and the author of several excellent articles on the values of the Roman Catholic Church. It was clear from his demeanor that he had some plans for which money would be required.

Before the good priest could say anything the Archbishop said, "Here's another who has come to share his problems with us."

The Archbishop was seated in his chair on the verandah and he signalled to Father Injakilody to sit down, even as he continued talking. "I am wondering how to make both ends meet. I am also deep in debt and am wondering how I can make some money."

Father Injakilodi's hopes collapsed. He had been hoping to get some funds from the Archbishop to satisfy a long standing demand of his people. They needed a church but had no money for it. Some help from the Diocese would give them a good start, but how could he ask for money in the light of what he heard?

But all the same he had an idea for clearing debts. "May I suggest a way to clear our debts?" he asked. "We have bought a lot of land in many places which are lying unused. I doubt if the people in those areas will join us. Would it not be wiser to sell some of that land and clear our debts?"

The Archbishop listened patiently to the argument and then said, "No, don't do that. I would suggest, Father, that you go to those places and see if you can buy up some more land and let me know. It does not matter, if we run up debts; it is all in aid of our mission."

Father Injakilodi had a horrible vision of the Church sinking in

a mire of debt and gave voice to his suspicion. “If we run up such debts——and cannot pay them back——should anything happen to Your Grace?” he stammered. “The Church will be ruined. We will die of starvation.”

The Archbishop only laughed. “Don’t worry on that score, man. This is the Catholic Church. If there are debts, the Church will pay.”

Chapter 49

A whole year's work had piled up in his absence, and needed his urgent attention. Then after he had dealt with it he hoped to go in for another session of Ayurvedic massage. He would also have to rest until he recuperated. But they remained mere plans, for circumstances were not quite favourable.

The schools under private management, especially those under the Churches, were in jeopardy. Panampilly Govinda Menon, the Minister for Education in Travancore -Cochin, was trying to obtain near complete control over the schools under the various churches. The fees collected by these schools would have to be accounted for and eighty percent of the money would have to be surrendered to the government, and the schools would have to manage all expenses with the remaining twenty per cent. Not only that but they would have to give detailed accounts of their expenses to the government. Moreover, teachers would henceforth be appointed by the government and that, too, taking into account proper representation of the various communities.

Much publicity regarding this had been given in the newspapers and over the radio. The Archbishop received notice of this from the government and he wasted no time in taking action. He decided that he would postpone all his plans to rest and decided to confront the government head on.

Everyone's attention was on what action the Archbishop would take. Everyone wanted to know what he would say. The newspapers eager to get his reaction promptly sent journalists to interview him.

And he roared.

He was running all his schools efficiently without any grant from the government whatsoever. The only thing the government did was to give recognition to these schools. But now here was the government desirous of appointing their staff through the Public Service Commission. Then what rights did the Managements have?

"But some teachers from Your Grace's schools are supporting the Government," said one journalist.

“There are always some rebellious people in every organization who do not know what they are doing. How they ruin the ground they stand on.”

“Your teachers are not being paid satisfactory wages says Panampilly,” said another journalist.

“Well, that is a fact. We collect very modest fees from our school-children and we have to meet all our expenses including the salaries of the teachers and the other staff from this pitiful amount. We just cannot pay our teachers more than this. The Government has forbidden us to collect more fees. So then it is for the Government to raise the salaries of the teachers and pay it themselves. That is how the government can help the managements.”

“So Your Grace fully intends to fight the government,” said another.

“I am running more than a hundred schools and I have not been paid even a small coin by way of grant from the government. I get all my funds by way of donations from Catholics from other lands. What else can I do but fight it out? Even if I have to close down every school I do not intend to yield to Panampilly’s machinations.”

Then he sat down and wrote a letter to all the churches. “So far our managers and teachers and schoolchildren were like one happy family working in unison. But with Panampilly’s plans the managers and the government appointed teachers will be set against each other. What greater degradation can we have than such a situation?”

This was sent to every church and duly read out to the congregations. The people were informed of the truth and urged to fight the imminent shackling. This was also published in the newspapers and became a subject for editorials. Even his former enemies forgot their enmities and gathered under one umbrella to fight the government.

Panampilly’s staff advised him to come to terms with the School Managements, so they were invited to a meeting to thresh out the matter. But Mar Ivanios was not willing to budge an inch from the stand he had taken. The meeting was a failure. Panampilly was furious and went around the countryside screeching venom.

“No matter who opposes me I shall carry out my plans for the Secondary School education,” he roared.

“We shall see,” said the Archbishop.

The stir intensified. All the Managements gathered together and

joined forces and went ahead with their opposition. The majority of the newspapers supported the Archbishop and woke the general public to the dangers entailed. The general public supported the Christians who had worked hard and so selflessly to make Travancore a highly literate state. After all Travancore had the distinction of being the most literate state in the country.

While this struggle was going on the Archbishop heard some unpleasant news. "Some teachers from two or three of our schools have gathered together to work with the government against us. They are making the children of those schools raise their voices against us."

The Archbishop at once issued a statement. "I intend to close down those three schools and I shall write to the government accordingly. We shall hand over the buildings to our convents and they can run orphanages in them."

He made it very clear that even if he had to close down every one of his schools he would not hesitate to do so. Panampilly did not need his advisors to make him realize the futility of fighting against Mar Ivanios. He was badly shaken and decided to withdraw from the confrontation.

Not only that but the government agreed to pay the teachers from the government coffers.

Mar Ivanios was victorious, but physically he was very much weaker. He needed rest but somehow could never do so.

He could not however hope to go on in this fashion. No one knew what exactly the matter was with him. Perhaps, he thought, it would help if he went away to some remote spot to rest and that was how he went to Devikulam. Father Seraphion went with him to help him and generally look after him.

Even after a whole month there he was no better. In fact he was becoming weaker. He realized then that he was seriously ill. Earlier he had found some relief after the Ayurvedic massages. But this was not like that. Perhaps he had run his race and needed to lay down his burden. Perhaps this was a pointer to his eternal rest.

He was sitting one day in his easy chair under the shade of a tree in the garden at Devikulam, enjoying the cool breeze. There was a pile of papers on the table in front of him. Whenever he felt strong enough to do so he would lean forward and carry on with what he

was writing. He was engaged in writing his autobiography and he still had quite a lot more to write.

Suddenly he stopped writing and spoke to Father Seraphion who had come out to him. "Let's return to Trivandrum. I do not feel well here at all."

Father Seraphion was alarmed and worried and did not know what to say.

"As soon as we reach Trivandrum you should build me a small house to rest."

"Your Grace means the Bishop's Palace."

"All that can come later. I am talking about my tomb. You must start on its work at once."

Father Seraphion felt a swimming sensation in his head. It was like receiving a sock on his jaw. Was this magnificent sun going to set so early?

"Why are you so silent, Father Engineer?"

Father Seraphion shook himself out of his trance and said, "Nothing is going to happen to Your Grace. There is no need to build a tomb right now."

The Archbishop paid no heed to his words but carried on as if he had not spoken. "We must build a Cathedral next to the Bishop's Palace in Pattom and I want to be buried in the chancel of the Cathedral."

He returned to Trivandrum with these plans in mind and put them into practice as soon as he had reached there. He lay in his bed in the Palace, but he kept a close watch on the construction of the Cathedral next door.

When he felt slightly stronger he got out of bed and leaning on his stick with Chackochen supporting him, he slowly walked out to the new construction. Nero, his little dog went with him. Wherever he went Nero accompanied him. He was always there in the car with him. When he got out of his car Nero would fetch his stick to him. Ever since the Archbishop's illness Nero was accustomed to lie curled at his feet.

He walked over to the Cathedral and went to look at his tomb. When he saw that a look of displeasure spread over his face. He had specifically asked for his tomb to be built in the chancel, under the main altar. But he found that his tomb was being built at the eastern

end in the sacristy.

He at once called out to Father Seraphion. "Didn't I give you specific instructions about my tomb? Have this pulled down at once and build one as I asked you to."

Father Seraphion stood still without saying anything for a moment. Perhaps he was appalled at the idea of pulling down a construction that was half way to completion. The Archbishop turned angrily against him. "Pigs do not wait for the moonlight to create havoc. Have this tomb pulled down and make sure another is completed as soon as possible."

When the Archbishop returned to his rooms he found that Mathai *Saar* had come to see him all the way from Pandalam. This time he had his son, James, with him. Mathai *Saar* drew his son forward. "Your Grace my son wants to become a priest."

James went forward and kissed the Archbishop's hand and stood waiting to hear his reply with folded hands.

The Archbishop cast a keen glance over the fifteen year old James. He saw a brown-skinned, strapping young lad with wide open eyes, and an intelligent look on his face and instantly approved what he saw. One of his elder brothers was a priest in the diocese, and another was studying in the Seminary. One of his sisters was a nun in the convent in Bethany.

The Archbishop was only too happy to accept him into the fold. "I think, Mathaichen, that your son should join the monastery. I hope more members of your family will join the clergy."

Then he blessed the young lad.

As the days passed, he grew weaker. He did not have any appetite, and could not digest any food. There was a slight swelling on his abdomen and it was growing like a tumour. He was extremely uneasy and everyone was alarmed.

Doctors from the Medical College came to examine him every day but no one diagnosed his problem. It was becoming increasingly clear that surgery would be required, but they were not willing to take a chance, either. The alternative suggestion was to go to Madras where the facilities were better and where the well-known Dr. Masilamani and his wife were practitioners. Finally it was agreed upon that the Archbishop would be taken to Madras.

He underwent detailed examinations in Madras and the doctors

felt that surgery was the only solution. The priests who accompanied him to Madras at once informed the dioceses at Trivandrum and Tiruvalla of his condition, and Mar Severios and Father Seraphion promptly set out for Madras.

Sixteen well-known doctors performed the operation. The only good that came out of it was that they now knew what the matter was. His liver had many nodules on it.

The doctors explained to the priests who accompanied him that the liver was an important organ and it was not possible to remove it. It was now up to God whether he found a cure or not.

The Archbishop was removed to his room in the hospital after the surgery. He was in great pain, but he smiled at his worried assistants and even quoted a poem in Malayalam to assuage their worries. If anything it only made them sadder. But even in his extreme agony he did not forget to inquire about the administration of the Church. "Has Cardinal Tisserant come yet?" he asked.

Cardinal Tisserant was the one in charge of the Eastern Dioceses of the Roman Catholic Church. He had agreed to pay a visit to Malankara. Thomas one of the twelve Apostles of Jesus Christ had come to the shores of India nineteen centuries ago and there were plans among all the Christians of Malankara to celebrate that anniversary. Cardinal Tisserant as the Pope's representative, was to be the Chief Guest at this function.

When he had celebrated the silver jubilee of his consecration as Bishop he had received a letter from Pope Pius XII congratulating him, and praising his efforts at reunification with the Catholic Church. What was even more important to him was that this long letter was written by the Pope himself. He had not had the luck to go and meet him in person so now he hoped he would at least meet his representative, Cardinal Tisserant, before he died.

Mar Severios did not have good news for him. "I hear the Cardinal is not coming, Your Grace."

"Why not?" asked Mar Ivanios in surprise.

"Someone wrote to him that St. Thomas did not come to India or Malankara at all, and that if he, Cardinal Tisserant came, he would be met with opposition. As soon as he heard that the Cardinal cancelled his trip to India."

His fury knew no bounds when he heard this. The blood rushed

up his face in a most alarming manner. "What!" he roared. "Who said that St. Thomas did not come to India? Which blithering idiot gave voice to this complaint? What a pity there was no one here to give Rome a fitting reply to this lie!"

It is well known that the Apostle Thomas did come to Malankara and established seven and a half churches here. Of these, the only church site which was not discovered as yet was the one in Nilackal, and it had been his ambition to find the site. That had been undertaken by a man from Mylapra, named Geevarghese. This Geevarghese was the eldest son of Kor Episcopa Abraham of Thengumtharayil, and the brother of Father Abraham of Mylapra who had reunited with the Catholic Church.

This intrepid adventurer had spent several years in the forests near Sabari Mala toting a gun for personal safety. At least he did manage to reach Nilackal and did find the remains of the ancient settlement. He had also cut a good stout cane from the site of the vanished church in Nilackal and had bound it in silver before presenting it to the Archbishop as a memento of his search for the church.

And yet someone had dared to say that the Apostle Thomas had not visited Malankara in the first century!! What pained him more was that there was nothing he could do about it in his weakened condition.

It was extremely hot in Madras. The temperatures soared. Perhaps it added to the patient's discomfort, for his temperature also rose, causing alarm among the doctors. They advised him to be removed to a better climate.

"Suppose we take him to Bangalore," suggested Mar Severios. "The St. Martha's Hospital has all the modern gadgets necessary and the personnel required."

The doctors in Madras agreed. He had to be carried into the car, and the journey was not pleasant. But it did not help him in any way. So the Archbishop said, "Why waste time here. Let us go to Trivandrum at once. I have a lot of work to complete there."

He could not travel by car any more, so Mar Severios made all the arrangements necessary for him to fly to Trivandrum. Mar Severios had planned to travel back with him, but at the last minute, Mar Ivanios objected.

"No. You must not travel with me on the same flight. Suppose

something should go wrong with the flight, the hierarchy in Malankara will be orphaned. The Church will then have to depend on Bishops from other rites to ordain priests or consecrate bishops. And what our enemies foretold will come true.”

Chapter 50

He was back in his room in Nalanchira. He lay back in his bed eyes shut, dictating a pastoral letter to Father Koshy O.I.C. He spoke very softly and slowly, as he was very weak.

“I grieve over my non-Catholic brothers who are flesh of my flesh and bone of my bones, who have not reunited with the Catholic Church. I had high hopes that the reunification would be total, but that was not to be. I hope my wish will come true in the near future.”

He then went on about his hopes for the future of the Church, how each member should strive to attain perfection, and that it should be the aim of all parents to raise their children for Christ. He hoped that Christ would rule in every christian heart and home.

He found it difficult to continue speaking and was quiet. Those watching over him felt it would be advisable to give him the last Sacrament, while he was still conscious. As word of that spread people began arriving in large numbers at his residence.

Mar Augustine Kandathil arrived and so did Mar Severios who was the chief celebrant. Many bishops, priests and nuns, and political leaders arrived to take part in the service. The Archbishop was conscious throughout the two-hour long service, and listened to each word attentively.

When the prayers were over the Archbishop's lips moved. His helpers had to lean down to hear what he had to say. “I know I have in my life done many things that were wrong, but I am very sure God will forgive me. For I did them all with a clear conscience.”

For two weeks he lay thus. But even in his illnesses it seemed he had many things on his mind. There were many unfinished things that bothered him.

One day he said, “I should like to go back to Pattom.”

He had lived for twenty years in Pattom and now wanted to spend his remaining years there.

Dr. Masilamani used to come over from Madras very often to meet his patient. The doctors were anxious to note the minutest change in the Archbishop's health. They kept examining him thoroughly. His blood count was very low. It showed in his pale face and the

doctors had already noted that. He would have to be given a blood transfusion at once.

At once each one there offered his blood and the doctors tested all of them. Ultimately it was found that Father Jose Mathews of Chalkadavil was the best donor.

Father Mathews was very pleased that he was selected to be the donor. And soon his blood was being slowly dripped into the Archbishop's veins.

People came from many parts of the state to see him. They came with tears in their eyes to say their final farewells to him. To each one of them the Archbishop would make inquiries about their homes and families. They would tell him in detail from where they came and how they travelled, and he would listen patiently.

"Have you seen Chacko?" he would ask. "If you haven't, go and see him." Chacko was in charge of the food and the kitchen. Whoever came to see the Archbishop would never be sent away hungry or thirsty. He could not have borne the thought so he would ask each one to go and meet Chacko. Not that the people gave a thought to their own comfort.

Each one wanted to be allowed to stay and gaze on that beloved face. But they would be forced to make room for the people who waited patiently outside to have a glimpse. The Archbishop often forgot his own infirmities when he saw the eagerness the people displayed in wanting to meet him. He would point to himself and smilingly ask, "Do you know who is lying on this bed?"

A question which startled not only his visitors but also his attendants. That face would be recognized anywhere in the world, not only in Malankara, and yet here he was asking if they knew who lay there. They would look at each other in surprise, and would not answer. Then he would say with a mischievous smile, "This is Father Jose Mathews."

"Dear God! What does he mean?" they must have muttered in their minds. They knew Father Mathews was seated in his office close by. But then one or other of the attendant priests would laughingly explain about the blood transfusion.

One day the Archbishop spoke to Father Koshy about the future of the Church. Father Koshy, anxious to pacify the Archbishop said, "Let us leave all that to God."

The Archbishop thought for a while and then said, "That's right. Let's surrender all our problems to God. But what about the things God has entrusted into our care."

Father Koshy had no reply.

The Archbishop then thoughtfully said, "God has been kind enough to help me achieve all I wanted to. I have two last desires. I want to say Mass in the Cathedral we are now building, and I want to consecrate another Bishop with my own hands."

Every one in the room felt an overwhelming sadness come over them. The Archbishop did not have the strength to stand up by himself. He would have to depart from this life without achieving either of these desires.

Noticing the gloom on their faces the Archbishop read their minds. And his voice hardened as he spoke. "I must achieve both of these desires. Definitely must."

He was aware that God would not allow his beloved Church to be orphaned. He had also found his successor and had written to Rome about it. Everyone was anxious to find out who it was, and soon the long-awaited reply came from Rome.

The successor's name was announced. It would be Father Benedict O.I.C.

He had taken over charge as Principal of the college, but he was now working as the Vice-Principal. The present Principal was Dr. Nangachiveetil who had returned from the United States of America with a doctorate.

Father Benedict was asked to come and meet the Archbishop. He was ordained Ramban and the date for his consecration as Bishop was announced. And a huge canopy was put up on the newly constructed floor of the proposed Cathedral.

The people came from every corner of the state. About twenty bishops came. Mar Severios and Mar Thomas Tharayil of the Kottayam diocese would assist him, and Mar Ivanios would be the main celebrant. A mysterious force seemed to be sustaining him. They began singing the Mass. The whole service would take three hours. With his own hands Mar Ivanios consecrated his beloved student as his successor, Benedict Mar Gregorios.

He was even able to stand up and say a few laudatory words about the new bishop. Pointing to the new Bishop he ended his speech

by saying, “He is gold. He is pure gold.”

The audience applauded.

The new Bishop was a very humble man. He stood up to thank the Archbishop who had spoken so admiringly about him. “Love is my light. These words will guide me through my life. I was born in a poor family, and I know what it is to go hungry. So my life will be devoted to alleviating the hardships of the poor.”

These words must have made the Archbishop extremely happy. His choice had been a good one. and he must have been even more happy because he had been able to do the two things he most wanted to do. Now he had to go and check on his tomb once more.

Chacko Kilileth gave his arm to the Archbishop to walk towards the tomb. He saw that it was complete and he stood beside it and said a short prayer. Then said, “My tomb. A small place for my final rest. I know I am moving towards it. Let me find my eternal rest and let me wake up happily to another morning here.”

Slowly he went around looking at all the construction going on. Then he got into his car and was driven to Nalanchira where he walked around looking at the massive college building and its hostels approvingly.

“Many people said that the Bishop of Bethany would have to go round with a begging bowl. But look at all this. Poor chaps. They did not understand what it would mean to join the Catholic Church.”

From there he went to his room and straight into bed. His health was fast deteriorating. He was in great pain. Liquid drained into his abdomen from his liver and the doctors would drain it out every day.

The newspaper reports of the Archbishop’s waning health brought people in their hundreds and thousands to see him. It was a veritable flood of people. And one day even the aged K.C.Mammen Mappillai came all the way from Kottayam to see him. Seeing the stooping, trembling old man get out of his car, Chacko Kilileth went forward to help him and between him and the driver, Varghese managed to help him into the Archbishop’s bedroom and into a chair beside the patient.

When he saw the emaciated form of the once magnificent Archbishop lying curled up on the bed, his heart broke and he burst into tears. He could not believe what he saw. The Archbishop was just a skeleton covered by his skin. The once flashing eyes were now sunken

and closed. Ramban Philipose bent down to the Archbishop and whispered in his ear, "See who has come to see Your Grace. Do look—"

Slowly the Archbishop opened his eyes. When he saw Mammen Mappillai he tried to smile. Mammen Mappillai leaned forward and gathered him into his arms and wept like a child. Then he sat back and together recalled old times. In the end before leaving he said, "I may not have been able to join Your Grace in the reunification, but I have always had a respect for it. As long as I have breath in me neither my paper nor I will ever say a word against Your Grace."

The people kept coming to see him and it was necessary to maintain a queue which was managed by Mathai *Saar* and his son Deacon James. Benedict Mar Gregorios sat on one side of him and Father C.T.Kuruvilla of the Changanacherry diocese sat on the other side. Two priests ordained by Benedict Mar Gregorios were also there in the room, Father Lawrence Thottam, and Father Zacharias Kilileth. Father Kilileth's elder brother, the driver Varghese was also there to help.

Every now and then the Archbishop would lose consciousness. His breathing was becoming difficult. Sometimes he would, with difficulty, draw a deep breath and he would then be heard calling on his Lord.

When he felt a little stronger, he called Benedict Mar Gregorios to his side. The latter had to put his ear to the patient's mouth to hear what he had to say. "When I go to Heaven after my death I shall pray to God unceasingly for my friends who did not join in the reunification."

Then turning his face to the cross by his bedside he prayed, "Father in Heaven, I thank you for the suffering You have given me. If it is Your wish I am prepared to suffer a hundred times more of this pain. It will only give me pleasure to suffer for Your sake."

Father Thomas Injakilodi came to meet him all the way from the Pandalam mission. When he saw him the Archbishop at once inquired about his work. "What progress have you made in your book?" he asked. He had a special fondness for writers. In spite of his busy routine the Archbishop had written about thirty heavy tomes. The only one of his books that he had not been able to publish was the Pashita Bible. He had translated the whole of the New Testament from the original Syriac language, but in his hurry to leave the Bethany

monastery in Perunad, he had forgotten to pack it with his things. Later inquiries about it were not successful and it remained lost. He did his best to forget it, but it remained in his mind and therefore always encouraged other writers.

“I have finished the book, Your Grace, and I will be publishing it shortly.”

“Congratulations! I too shall make a contribution towards it.” Then turning to Benedict Mar Gregorios he said, “Please give him two hundred and fifty rupees from me.” Father Injakilodi acknowledged the offer with tears running down his face.

The Pope’s representative in India, His Grace Dr. Martin Lucas came to see the ailing Archbishop. The latter could barely open his eyes, nor could he speak a word. Bishop Martin Lucas stood by his side for a while and thought of the man he once was. Once his frame would fill the whole bed, today he was curled up in it on one side.

Bishop Martin Lucas did not leave Trivandrum immediately. He decided to stay on until the Archbishop was able to open his eyes and perhaps say a word to him. It was a week before the patient was able to do so, and the first person he saw was Father Kuruvilla. The priest at once informed Bishop Lucas and Benedict Mar Gregorios. Both were immediately by his bedside.

“Your Grace, Bishop Martin Lucas is here to see you,” said Mar Gregorios.

The Archbishop heard that and tried to turn towards his visitor, but could not. However, he did speak very softly to him, “Welcome. A big welcome.”

Bishop Martin Lucas sat by his side and conversed in English. The Archbishop tried to respond and moved his lips but could not speak clearly. Bishop Lucas leaned forward and said, “I have been here for a week now. Now I should like to go to Delhi.”

“What a great privilege,” said the Archbishop softly and with difficulty.

“Your Grace deserves it,” replied Bishop Lucas. He then left for Delhi.

The Archbishop then turned to those standing around him and said, “I want a cross on either side of me, so I will be able to look on it whichever way I turn. Even if my eyes are shut, please carry on with your prayers.”

And then he shut his eyes. Father Kuruvilla started reciting the prayers.

He was obviously very thirsty for his lips always looked parched. Father Koshy sat by his side and gently dripped diluted milk on his lip, drop by drop.

The Archbishop was moving his lips in prayer, reciting the prayers for the feast of Mary of Mount Carmel. It was her feast the next day. It was a mystery that he knew that it was the fifteenth of July. He could not possibly have remembered it for he was not aware of the passing time. Did he know what year it was? Did he know it was the year Nineteen Fifty-three? It was very doubtful and yet here he was reciting the prayers for the feast of Mount Carmel. Mother Mary must have reminded her devoted son, herself.

The Archbishop was still praying. "Father, here is my life. I am yielding it to You. I am but a sacrifice on the altar of Your love. Break me and mould me and take me as Your sacrifice. Just give me the grace to bear what ever pain You send."

Wednesday evening. The sun had already set and the evening was growing darker. The Archbishop was obviously sinking. Each breath that he drew was painful. His chest rose and fell with much difficulty. Mar Severios and Mar Gregorios carried on with their prayers. So did the priests and nuns in the room. There was not a dry eye among them.

The night deepened and soon it was half past eleven. No one had dined or slept. They just stood around watching him helplessly. Suddenly the skeleton frame shook with a deep breath. All those standing by prayed "Jesus—Mary—Joseph——."

His eyes opened once more and for the last time his eyes gleamed. His eyes widened and then closed as his head drooped over to his right side.

The church bells tolled the knell announcing the departure of that great soul as it made its way to Heaven.



IN HIS MASTER'S FOOTSTEPS

(Life Story of Archbishop Mar Ivanios)

PETER C. ABRAHAM, MYLAPRA



“Peter C. Abraham in his delightful historical novel, “Malankara Sooryan” has given a very good picture of Archbishop Mar Ivanios who changed the lives of a large number of Christians and non-Christians in Kerala. The younger generation, for whom Mar Ivanios is only a name, should in fact be encouraged to read this book to get a comprehensive idea about this astonishing Archbishop. And they should not find it difficult to read it for Peter C. Abraham has adopted a simple appealing style for his narration.”

Most Rev. Cyril Mar Baselios
Malankara Metropolitan Archbishop



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KOTTAYAM - 686010
KERALA, INDIA.